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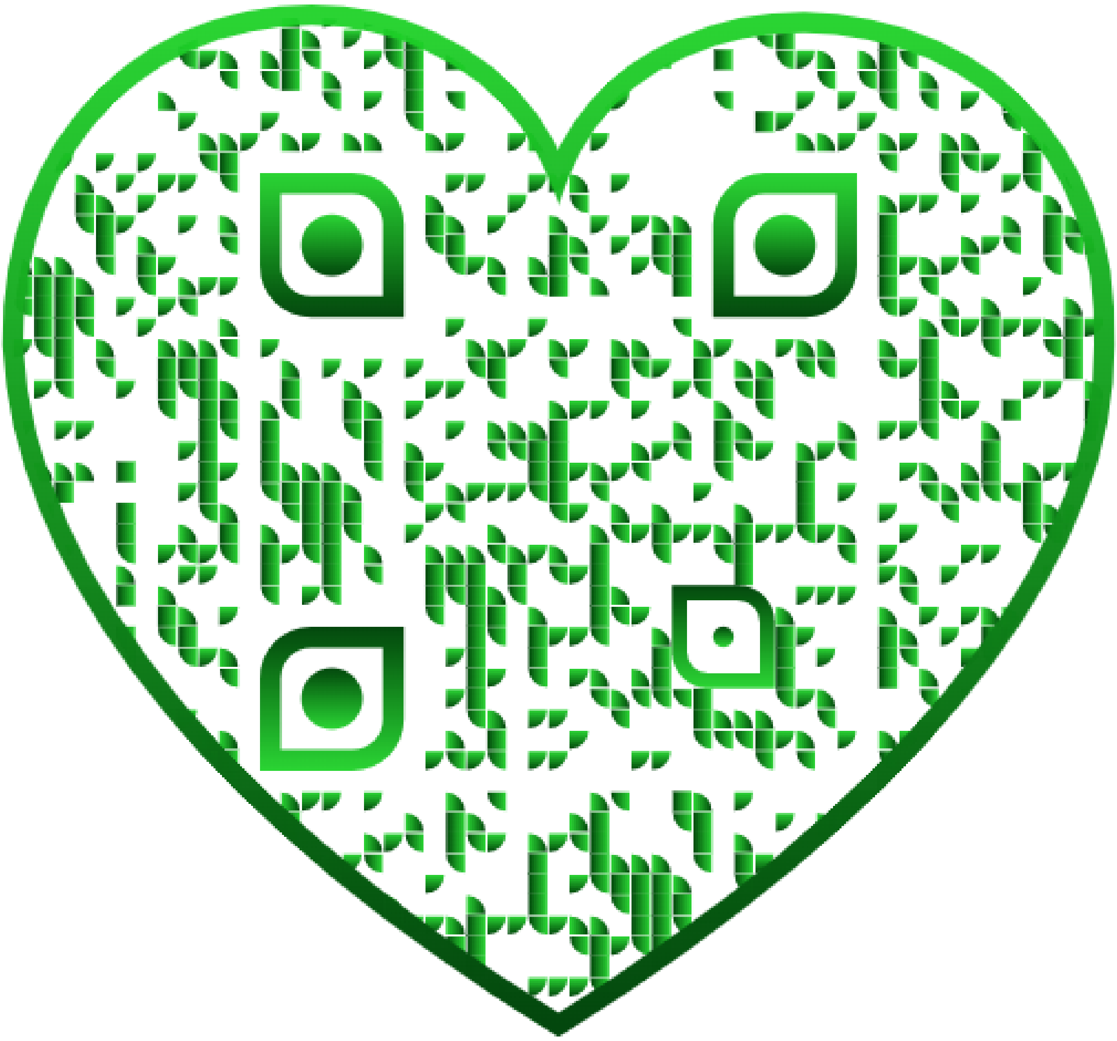

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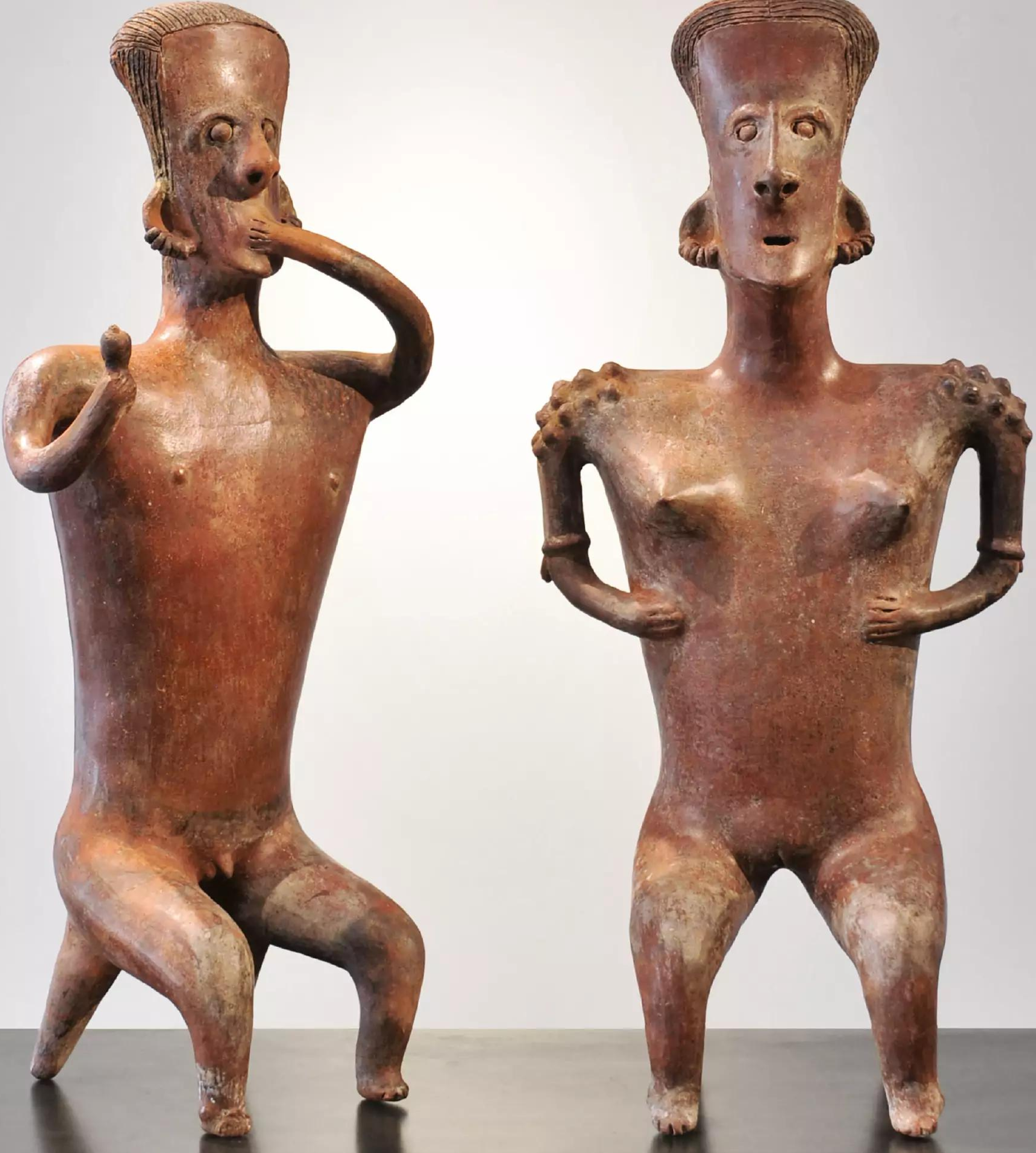

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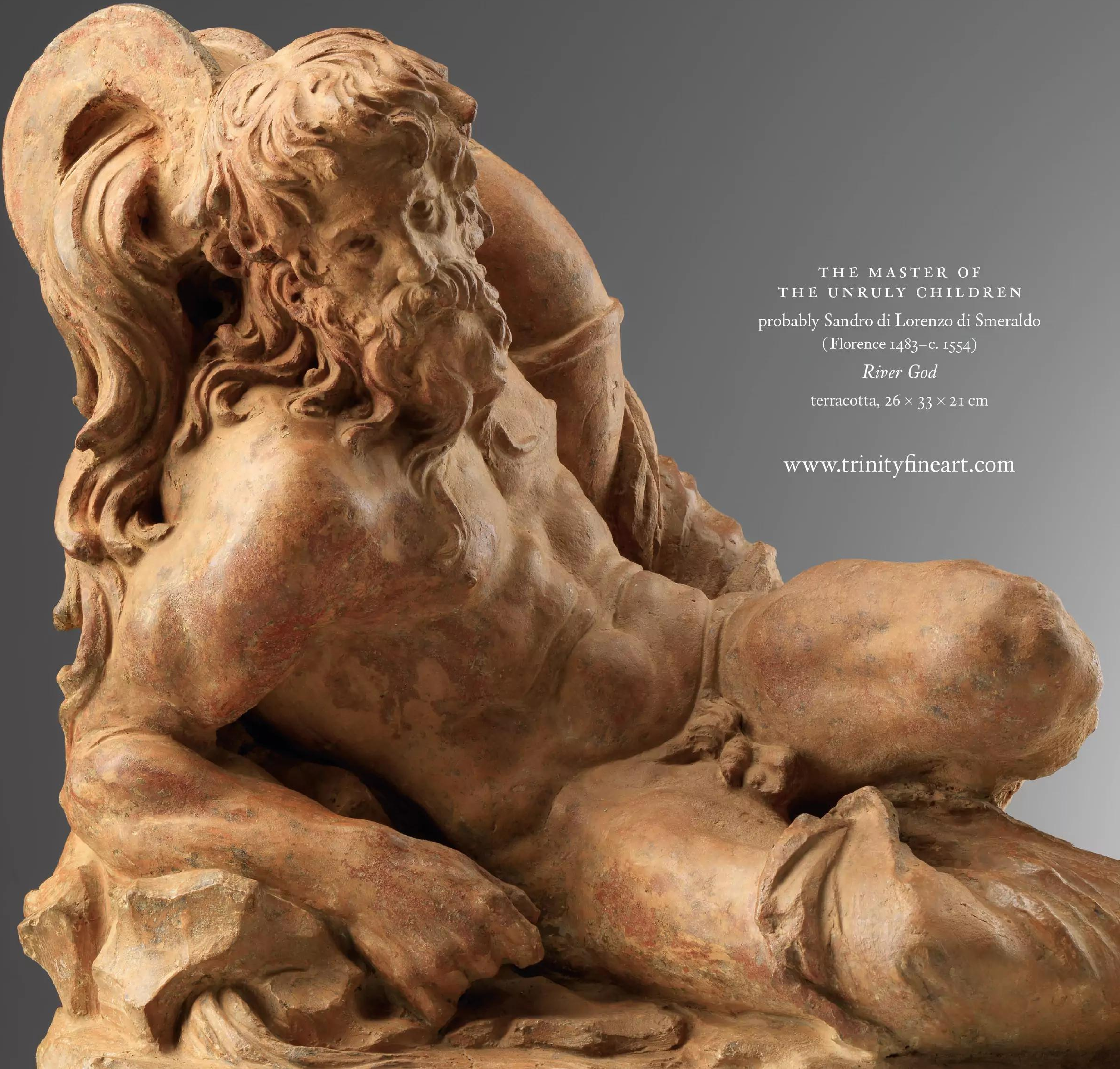

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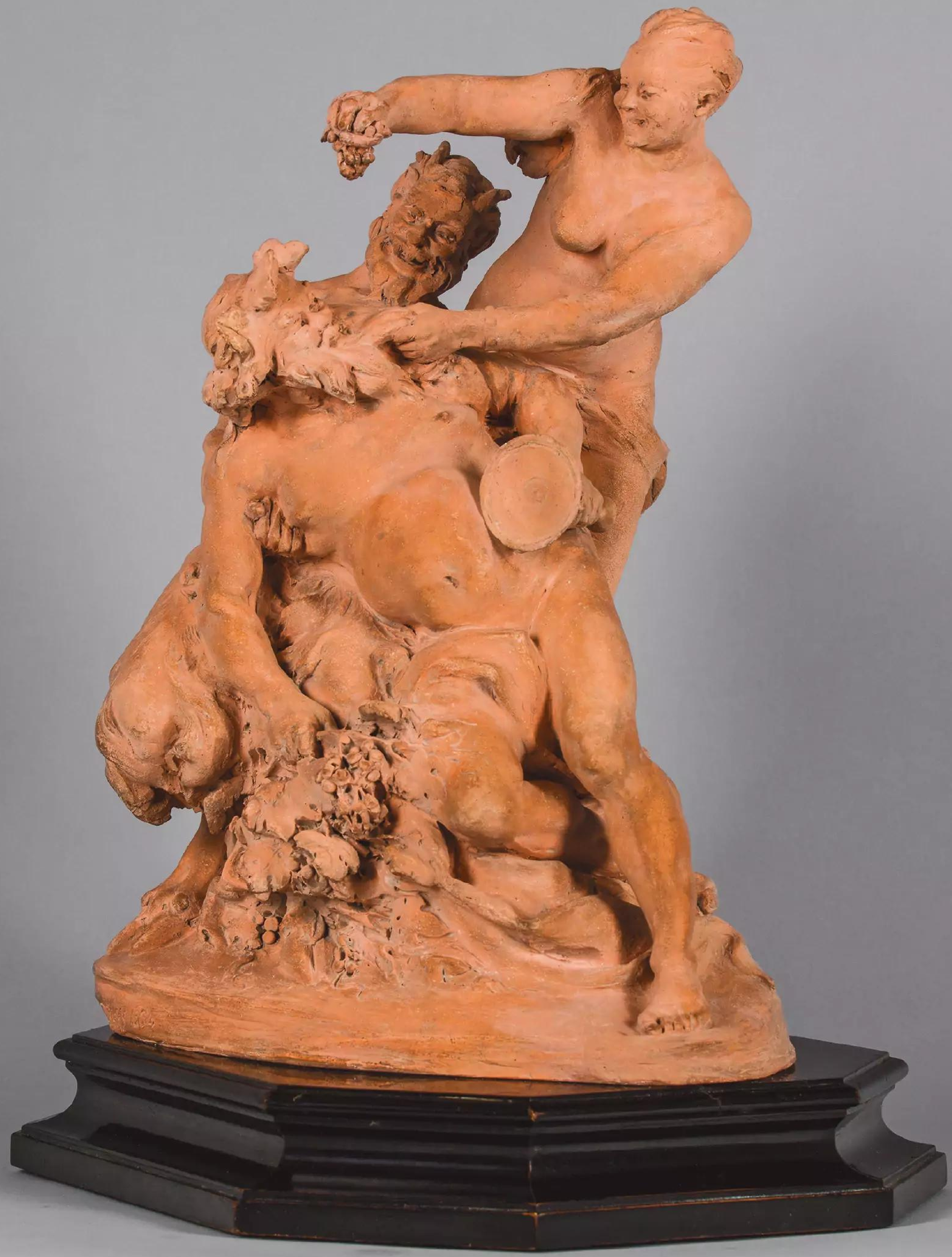

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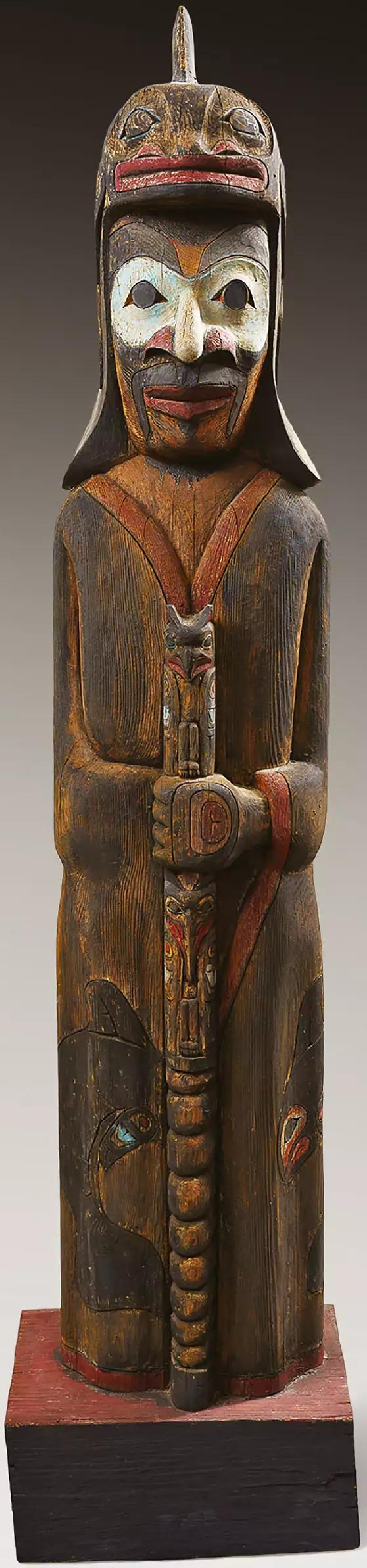
MAGNIFICENT KILLER WHALE CLAN MEMORIAL FIGURE



Kwakiutl people, Coastal British Columbia, Canada
Last quarter of the 19th century
Red Cedar wood, natural pigments
Height: 87 inches (221 cm)
Provenance: Private collection - Santa Barbara, California.
Art Loss Register certificate #S00258363
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Kwakiutl creation myths tell of ancient ancestors traveling the world transforming nature or themselves into new beings, some taking off their animal masks to reveal their human selves. These ancestors imparted their animal masks as crests for their *numaym* – or clan lineages, thus identifying the primary clans with specific animals, including the raven, wolf, bear, and killer whale. Portraying an ancestral Kwakiutl chief of the *Gispwudwada* or killer whale clan, this remarkable life-sized sculpture served as an important memorial figure, erected in a place of prominence inside the sacred clan house. The killer whale was an eminent and revered character in Kwakiutl cosmology and was itself thought to be an important chief in the undersea world, where these powerful beings enlisted porpoises and sea lions as servants and spiritual messengers to the human world.

Beautifully carved from red cedar wood by a Kwakiutl master carver, the ancestral figure is depicted clenching a speaker's staff surmounted by a pair of finely rendered horned owl totems. The figure dons a ceremonial dance cape, specific to the Killer Whale dance, that is decorated at the lower borders by a pair of killer whales. The ancestral chief is portrayed wearing an extraordinary *maxinuxw* or killer whale mask, rendered in a breaching form with prominently raised dorsal fin; its arched body carved in relief upon elegantly carved ear coverings that were traditionally fashioned from flexible animal hide or wool fabric. Visually supporting the mask, the chief's visage is sensitively carved reflecting a noble countenance, an application of light blue Vivianite mineral pigment boldly highlighting the central face and eyes, and below a mustache and beard are evident, neatly trimmed in Kwakiutl fashion. The ancestral chief's ensemble of finely carved ceremonial regalia, rich in Kwakiutl mythological imagery, and the rare life-sized aspect of the sculpture together lend a supernatural, yet compellingly real and powerful presence to this memorial figure of the Killer Whale clan...a noble emissary from another time, another world.

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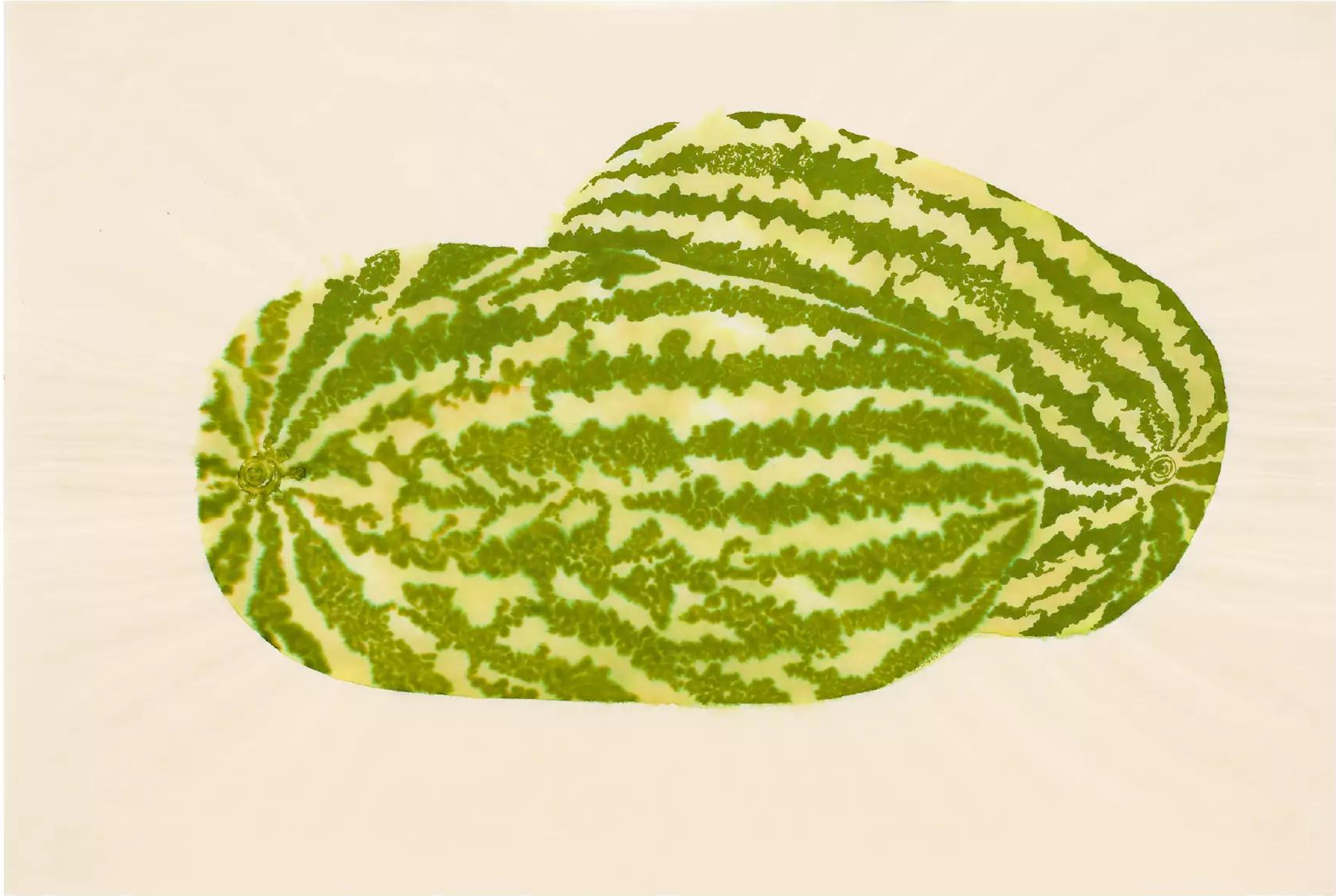

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Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland. Photo: James Paonessa; © 2025 Ruth Asawa Lanier, Inc., courtesy David Zwirner

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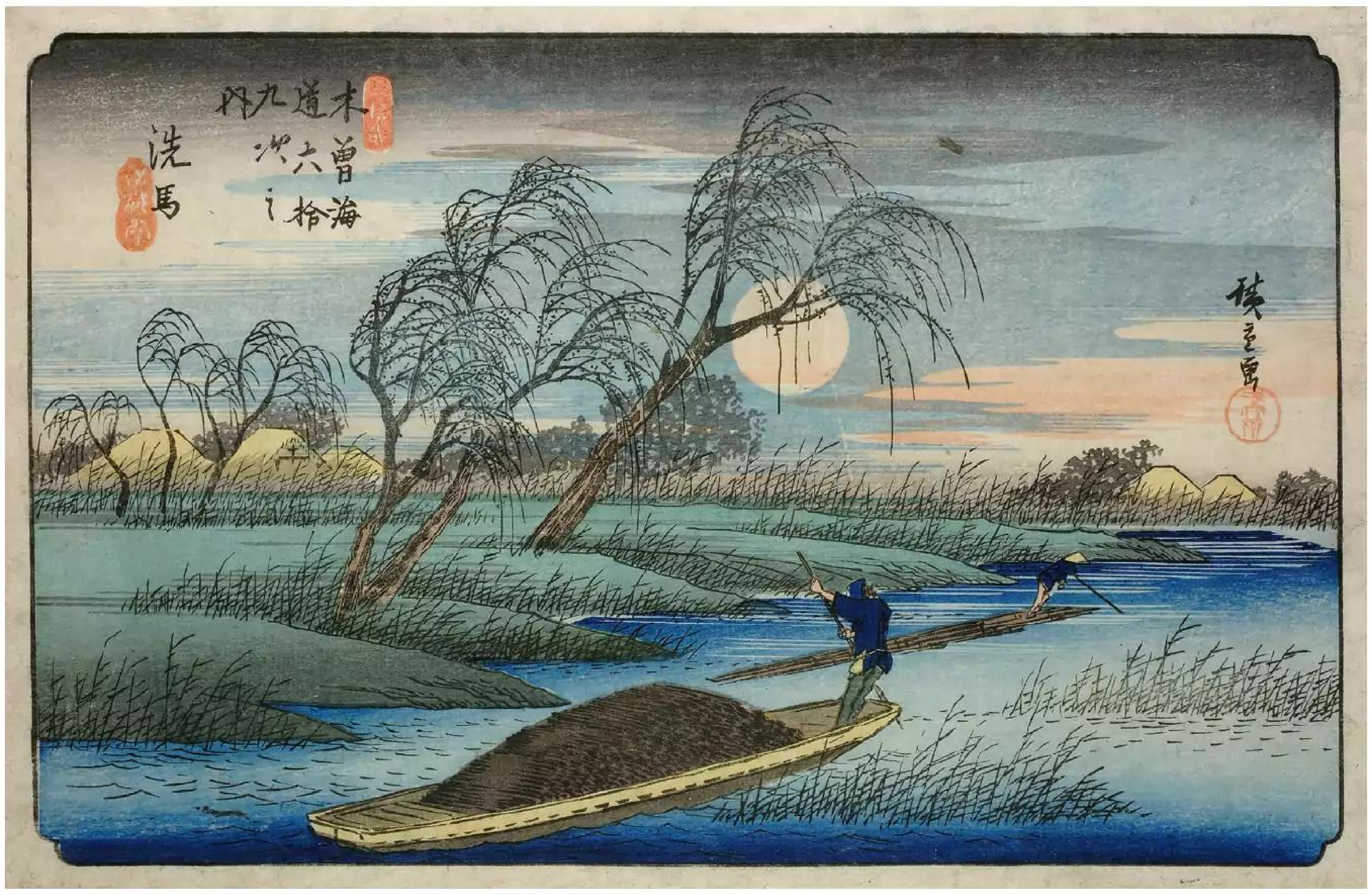

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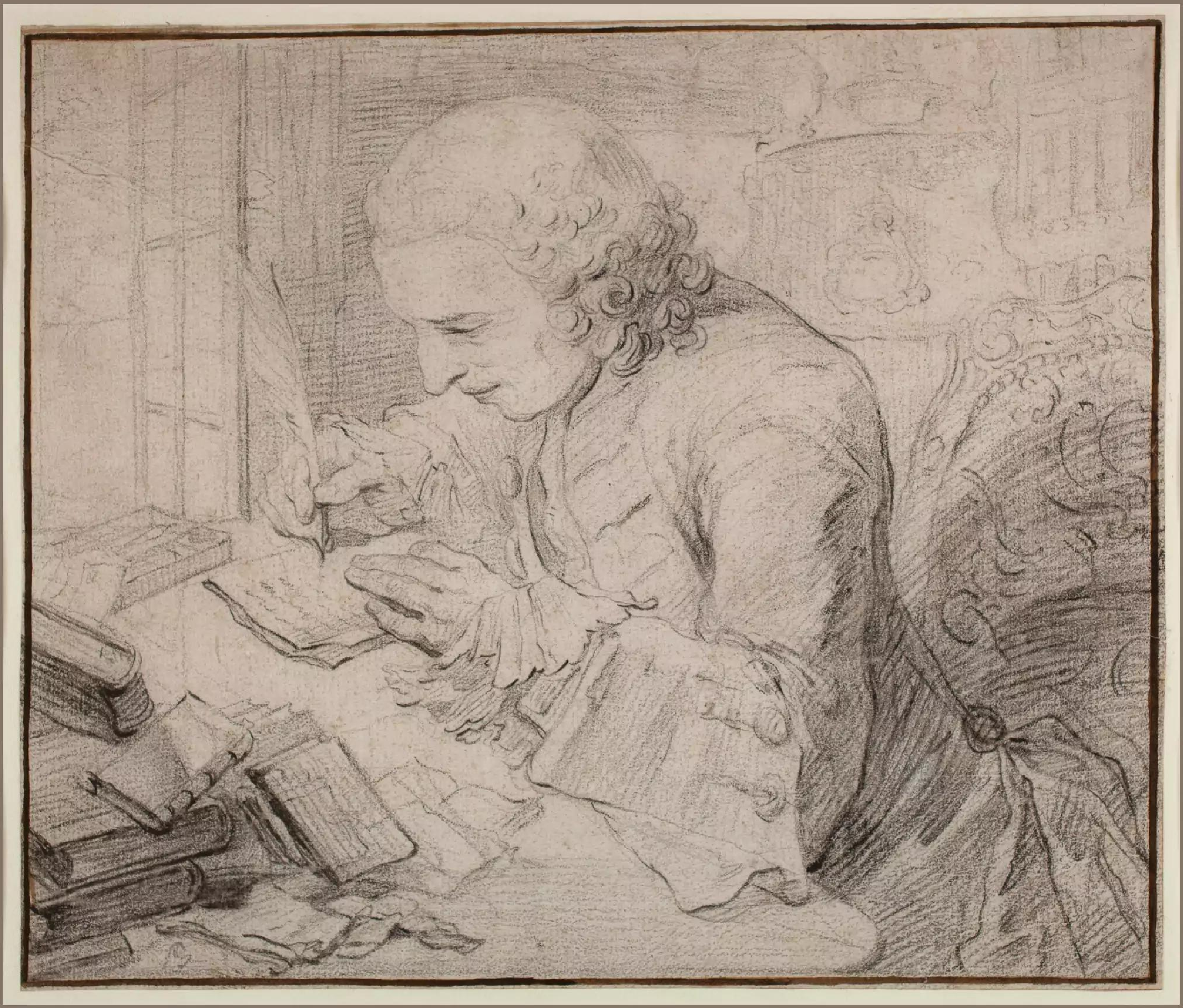

Gabriel de SAINT-AUBIN
Michel Jean Sedaine, Writing at His Desk
Black chalk on paper: 20.7 x 24.5 cm.

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Vase and bottle with *pennellate* decoration,
C. Scarpa, Venini S.A., c. 1942, private collection, Treviso.
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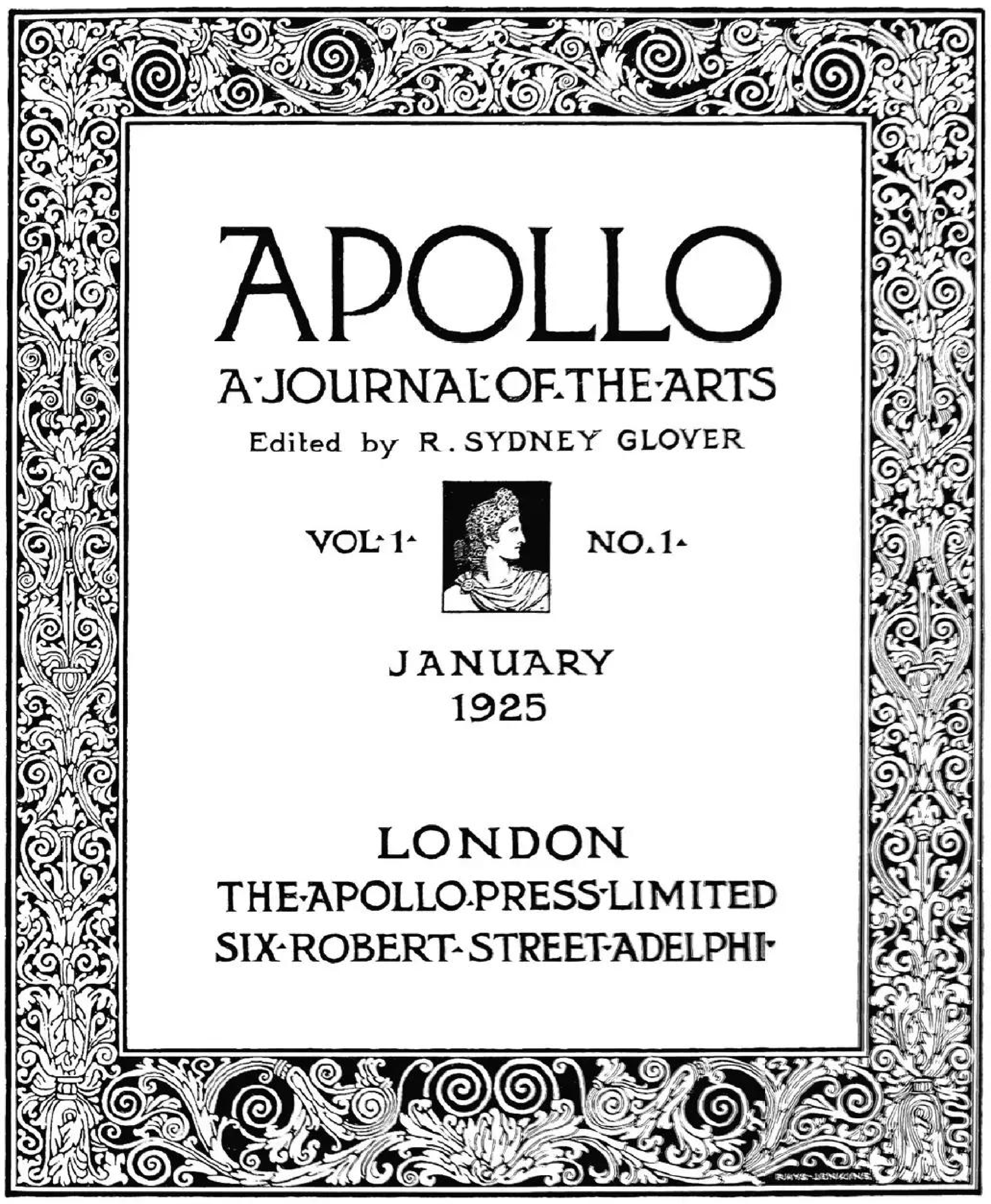
Editor's Letter

Story of the century



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VOL 1 NO. 1
JANUARY
1925

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1. *Apollo*'s first ever title page

In 1925, a small group of art lovers including the dealer Joseph Duveen and the art historian Tancred Borenius published the first issue of *Apollo*. They came from a cultural tradition that was as international as it was British. Just as the magazine's owners, editor and publisher shared an outlook not confined by borders, geographical or otherwise, so too did the writing. One piece in particular from the first issue seems to set the tone: an essay, by the editor and writer Dorothy Dudley Short, titled 'Music, Art and Life'. There is something reassuringly ambitious about trying to encompass all those subjects in an article that runs over a mere three pages. But ambition has never been a problem for *Apollo*. A century later, it remains the only magazine that covers all art, from the prehistoric to the contemporary.

The publishing landscape has changed a fair bit over the last hundred years. *Apollo*'s first issue appeared at a time when magazines were the harbinger of technological progress. Few of the specialist titles that sprang up then still exist. Avant-garde magazines such as *Ma*, *Blok* and *The Blue Review* exploited relatively cheap printing to distribute their cutting-edge ideas. But while *Apollo* has a reputation for connoisseurship, it has never believed this to be antithetical to a wide audience. It has always published essays for the cultured public, rather than the cognoscenti only. And as avant-garde movements have often shown, if you are too extreme in pursuing your vision you run the risk of talking only to yourselves. Or, as a character in Roberto Bolaño's novel *The Savage Detectives* says of a fictional poetry magazine: 'It folded […] just as people were starting to know who we were. What people? Well, other poets of course.'

In other words, *Apollo* is pluralist. It is not a magazine that is interested in advocating for a single way of being. *Apollo* has always engaged with different strands of art history – indeed, different histories. In its current iteration, at least, it hopes to tease out connections not just for the art historian but for anyone who is interested in thinking about the wider world. *Apollo* strives to join the dots – not to make the world smaller, but to show how large and interesting it can be.

This issue marks the celebration of our centenary year. One of the ways we've done this can be seen on our cover. The first ever edition featured an elegant drawing of the *Apollo Belvedere* on its front page. We've repeated the motif with a 19th-century photograph of the same profile from the Alinari Foundation – the world's oldest collection of photography and a source of many treasures. The picture was taken by Domenico Anderson in *c*. 1890. This image of an ancient artwork was taken using a brand-new technology; here today, it alludes both to the past and the future.

The centenary is a moment to recognise what makes *Apollo* matter. It is a magazine that enjoys context and depth over superficiality and surface; one that opens up different ways of reading the world around us. That is something worth celebrating.

Edward Behrens, Editor

Agenda

June

Our picks of the month

1 Patterns of Luxury: Islamic Textiles, 11th–17th Centuries

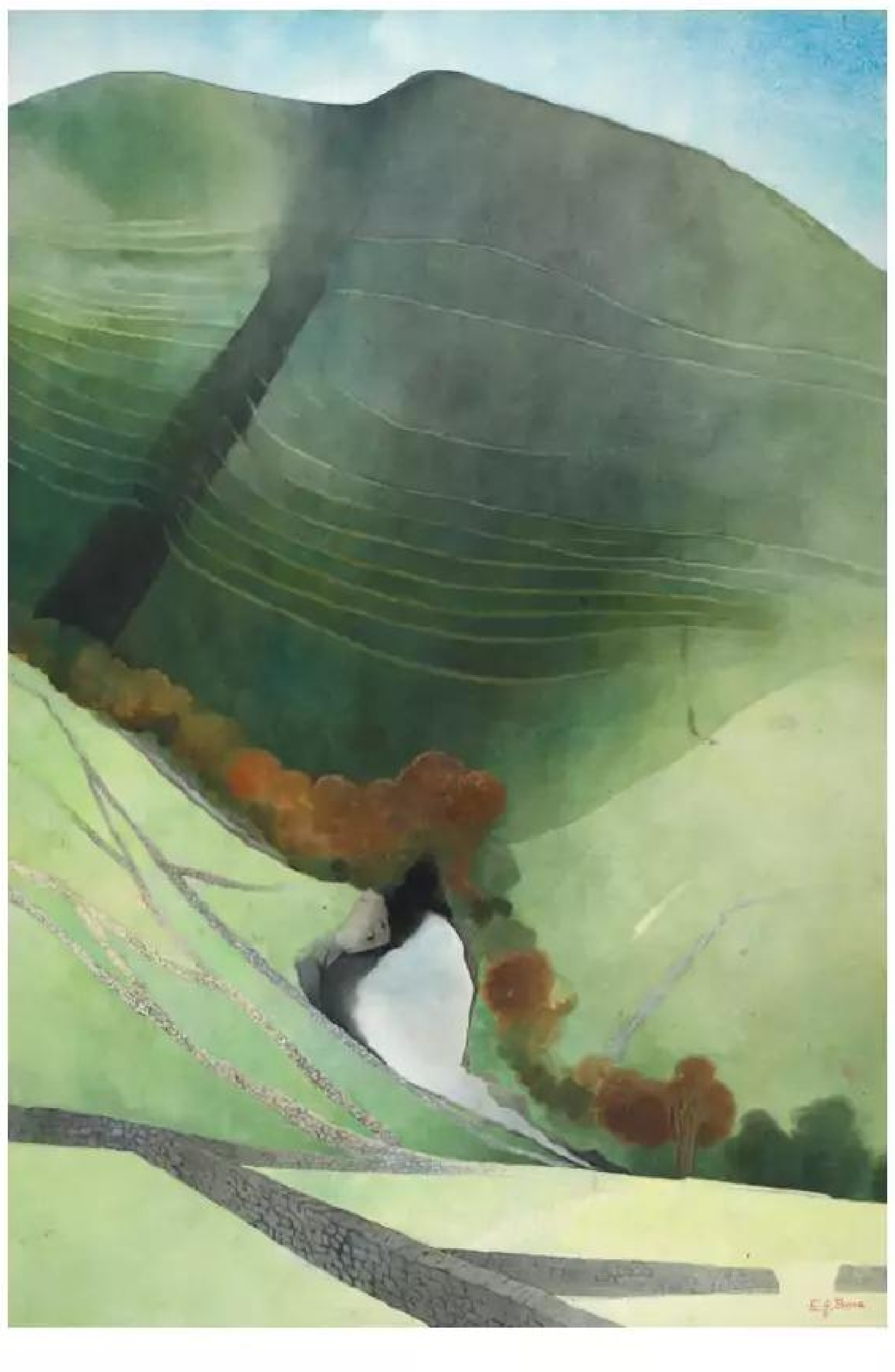
Saint Louis Art Museum
13 June–4 January 2026

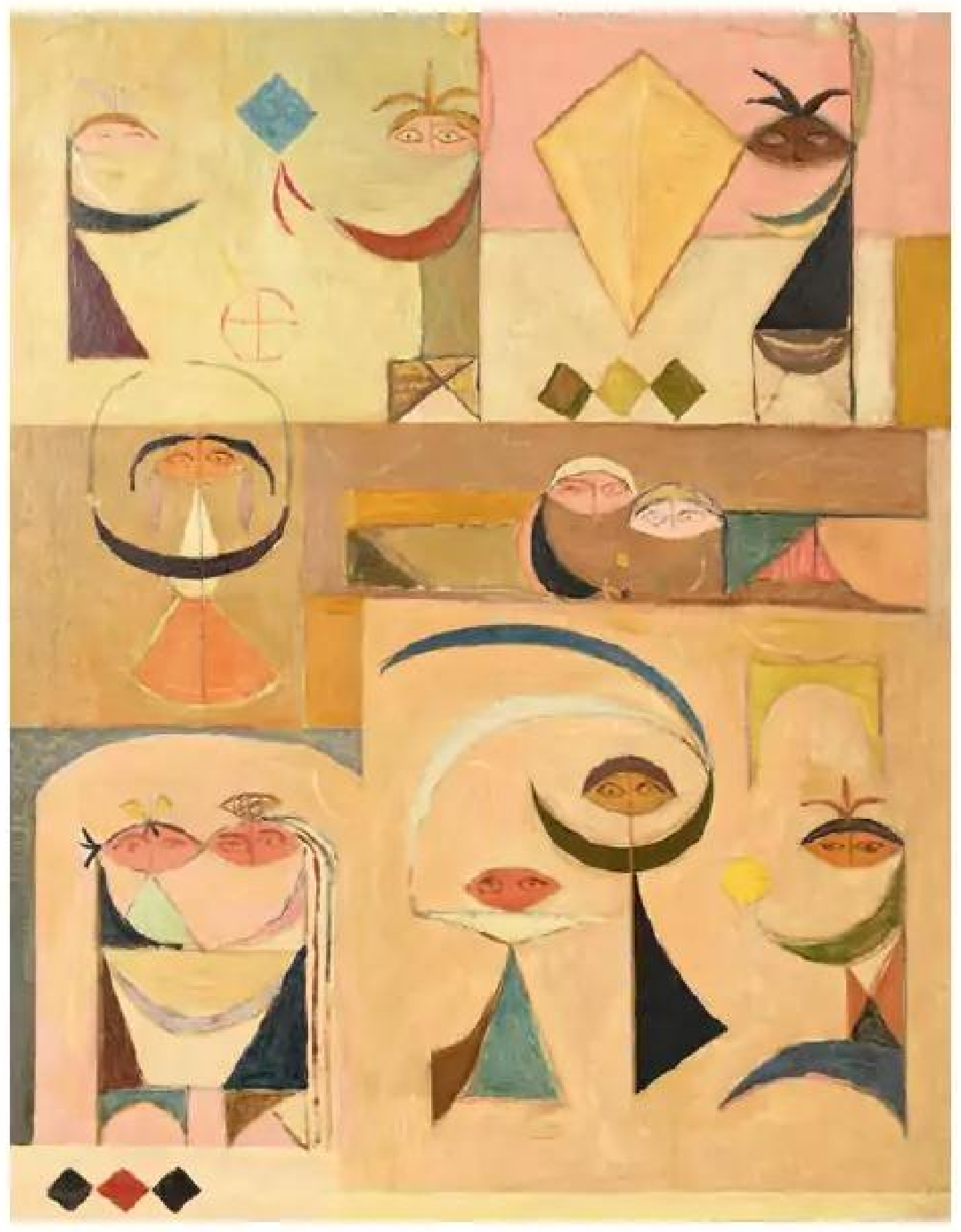
This exhibition presents an array of early Islamic textiles from the museum's collection, many of which have not been on public view for more than a decade. Highlights include a Persian textile fragment woven in silk and velvet with silver and gilt thread (17th century; pictured) and an intricately detailed fabric panel from 15th-century Spain stitched with Arabic inscriptions.

2 Edward Burra – Ithell Colquhoun

Tate Britain, London
13 June–19 October

Edward Burra is best known for his sardonic depictions of urban life in the early 20th century, capturing the cabaret clubs of Paris or the streets of Harlem in vivid watercolours. His first London retrospective for 40 years runs parallel with a major exhibition about the British Surrealist Ithell Colquhoun, which is travelling to London from Tate St Ives.

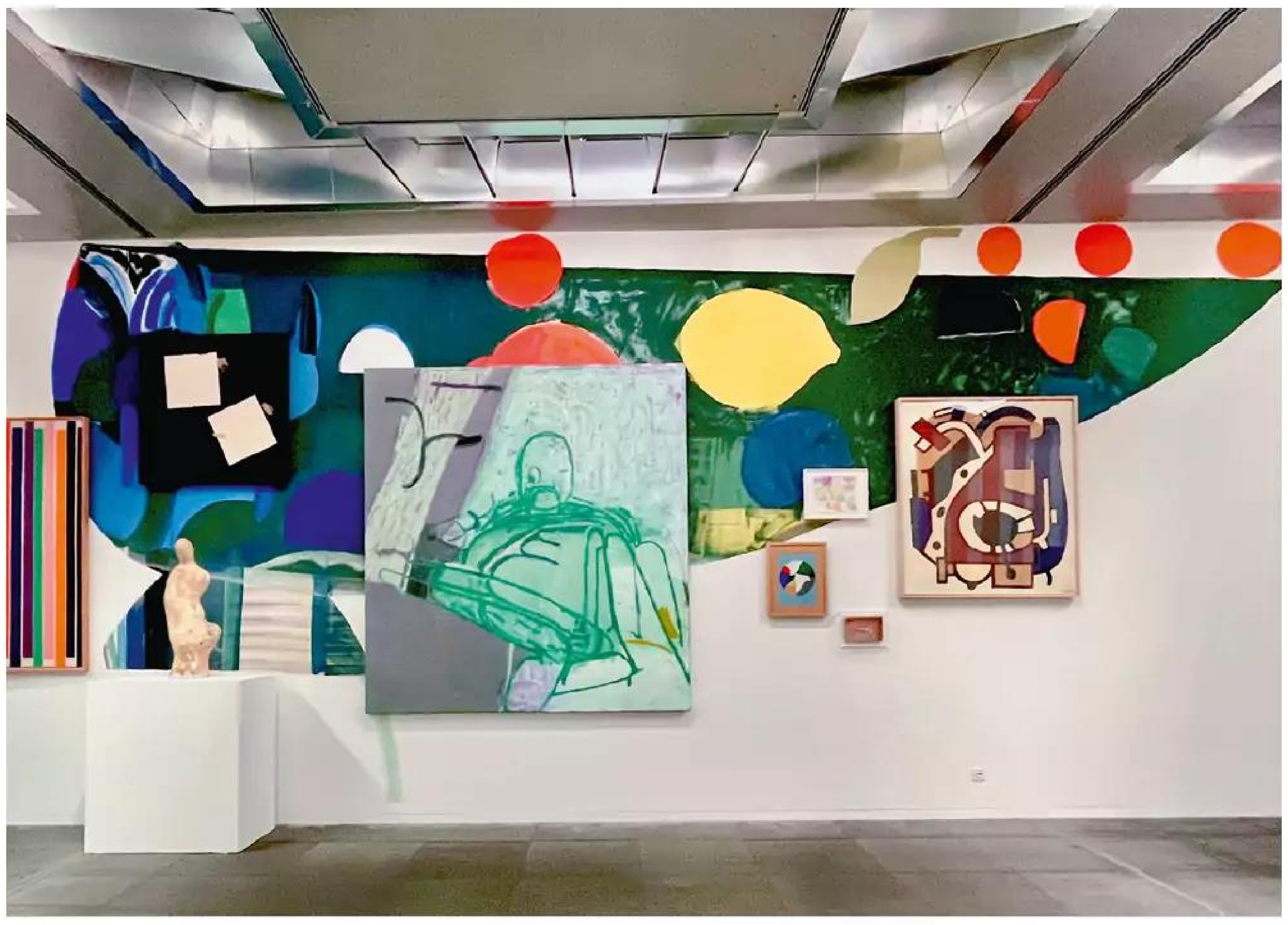




3 All Manner of Experiments: Legacies of the Baghdad Modern Art Group

CCS Bard, New York
21 June–19 October

With works made between 1946 and 2023, this exhibition considers the legacy of the Baghdad Modern Art Group, a collective of artists who sought to establish a new visual language in Iraq in the mid 20th century.



4 Amy Sillman

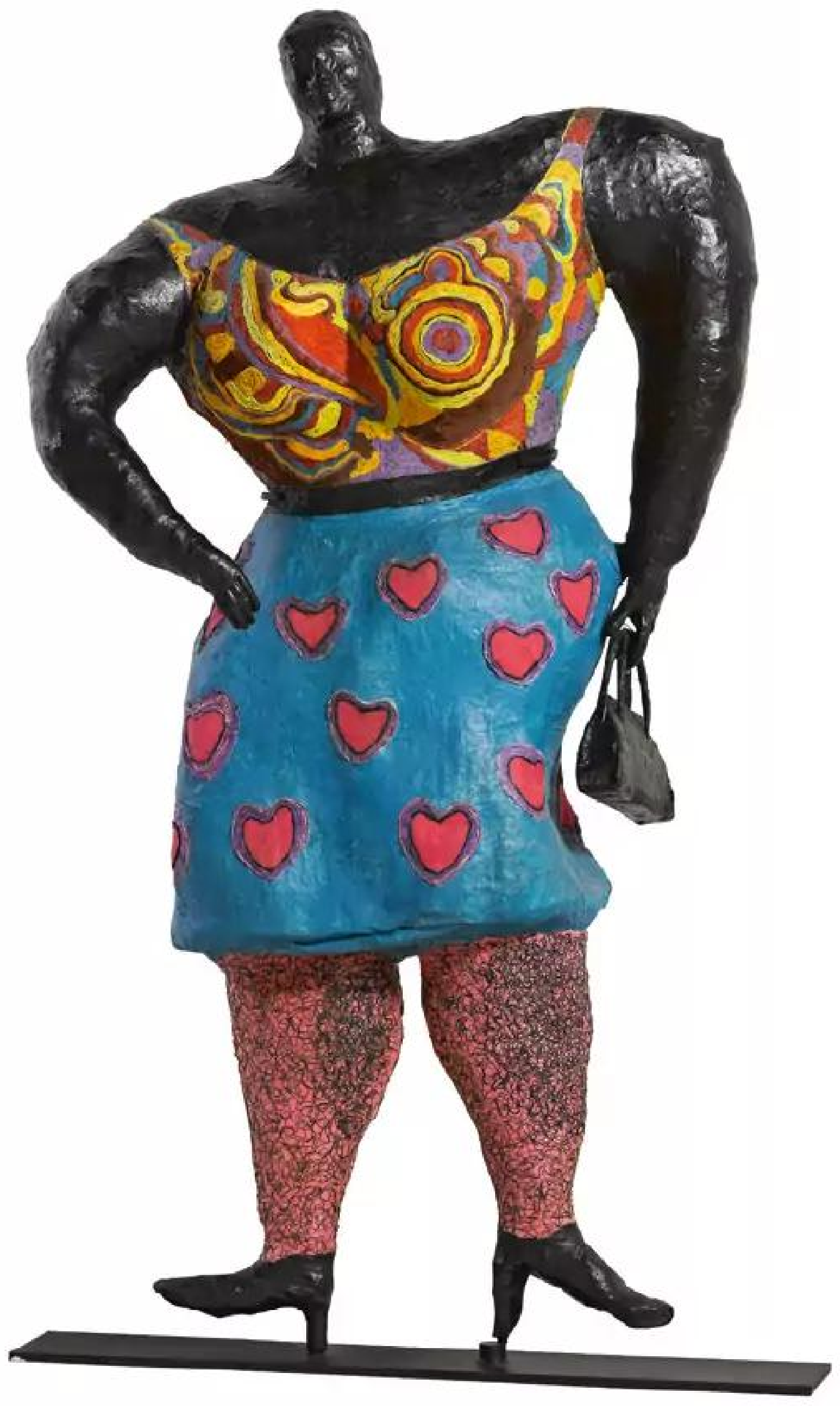
Dia Bridgehampton, New York
Opens 28 June

Working across painting, animation, printmaking and zines, Silmman has spent four decades refining an experimental style that blends figuration and abstraction. For her site-specific installation at Dia's Long Island outpost, the American artist is covering whole walls in the museum with paintings and prints, building on earlier interventions such as 'Oh, Clock!' at Kunstmuseum Bern (pictured).

5 Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, Pontus Hultén

Grand Palais, Paris
20 June–4 January 2026

The Swedish curator and museum director Pontus Hultén, who was head of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in the 1960s and the first director of the Centre Pompidou, was friends with and commissioned Niki de Saint Phalle and her husband Jean Tinguely. This exhibition traces the careers of the artist couple through their lasting ties to Hultén, featuring generous loans from the Pompidou.



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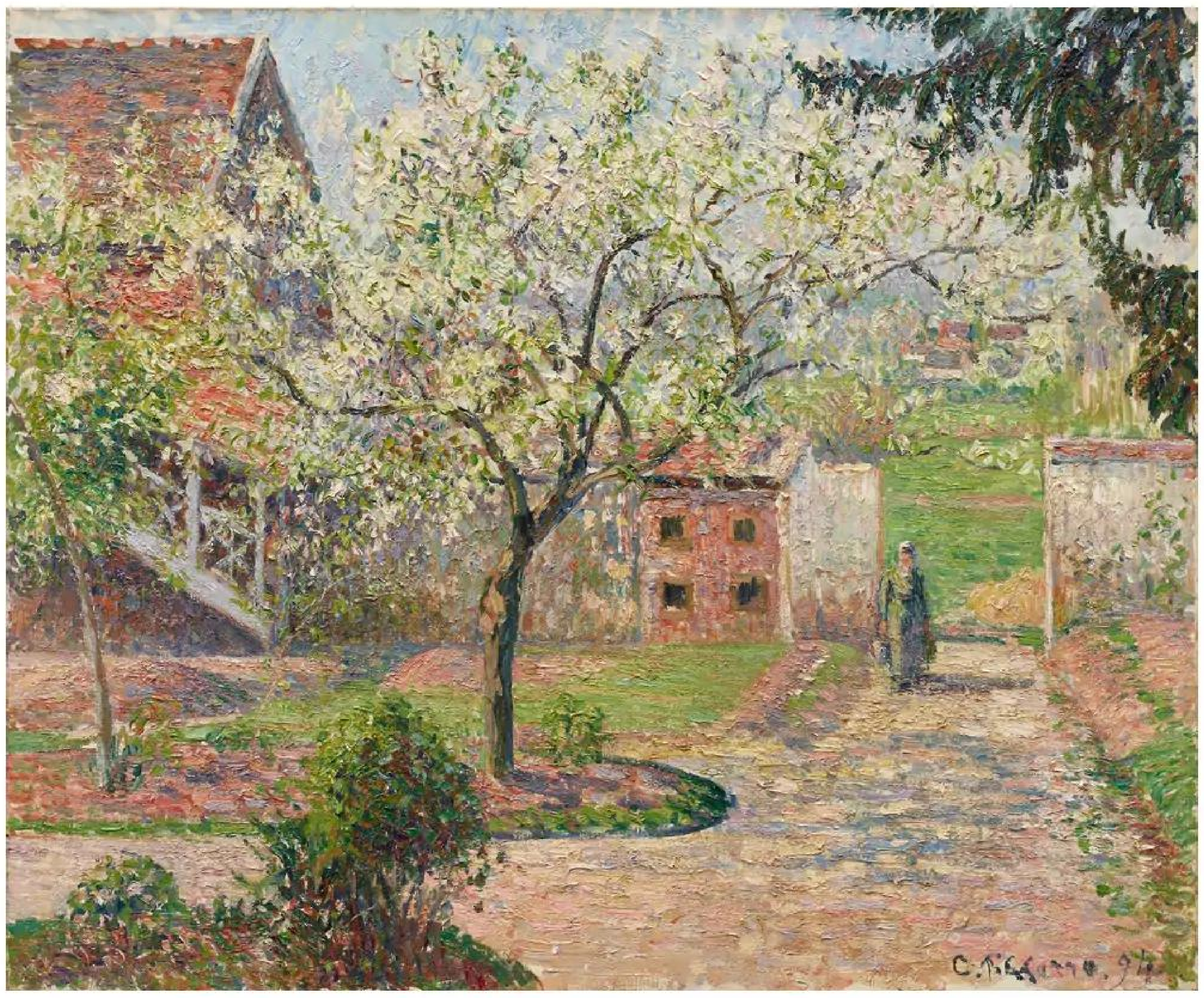
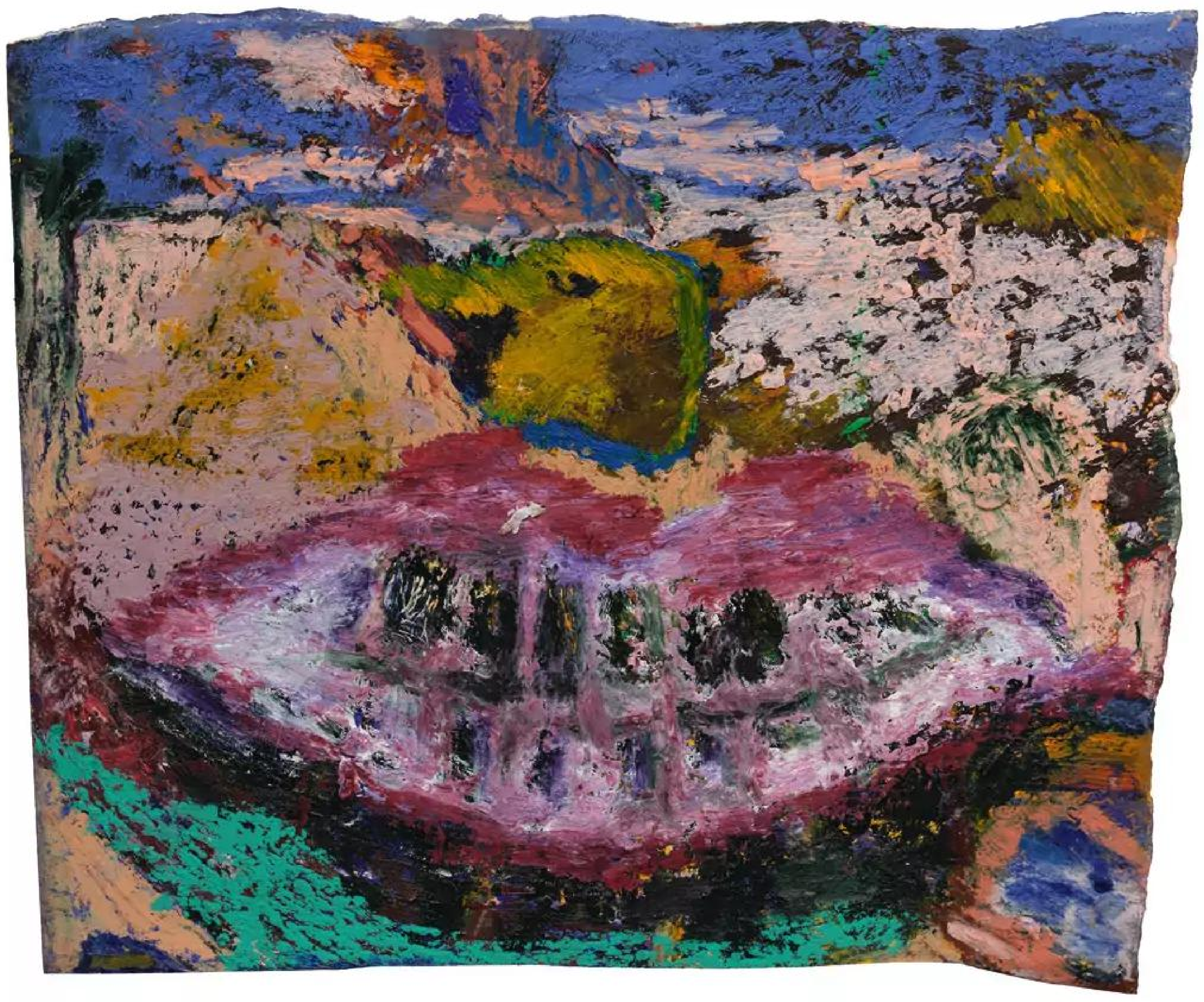


6 The Honest Eye: Camille Pissarro's Impressionism

Museum Barberini, Potsdam
14 June–28 September

Camille Pissarro was the only Impressionist to show in all eight of the group's exhibitions and is often referred to as the father of the movement. His work, however, tends to be less well known than that of his younger contemporaries, partly because of his ever-evolving style: hints of realism, Neo- and Post-Impressionism are also prominent across his *oeuvre*. This exhibition brings the artist renewed attention, with paintings such as *Plum Trees in Blossom, Éragny* (1894; pictured) among the 100 works on display.



7 Rachel Jones: Gated Crayons

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London
10 June–19 October

Mouths and teeth are recurring motifs in Jones's kaleidoscopic works, acting as entry points from which the British artist unpacks identity and what she refers to as the 'interiority' of Blackness. In her new series of oil stick and pastel paintings, Jones draws on the simpering expression of a dog pictured in *Head of a Hound* (*c.* 1660–65) by Pieter Boel, which is in the Dulwich Picture Gallery's collection.

8 Wolfgang Tillmans: Nothing could have prepared us – Everything could have prepared us

Centre Pompidou, Paris
13 June–22 September

Ahead of the Pompidou Centre's five-year closure for renovations, Tillmans has been given carte blanche to take over the second floor of its 6,000-square-metre public library. The installation includes photographs by the German artist from the last 35 years, as well as music, texts and live performances.

9 Paul Poiret: Fashion is a Feast

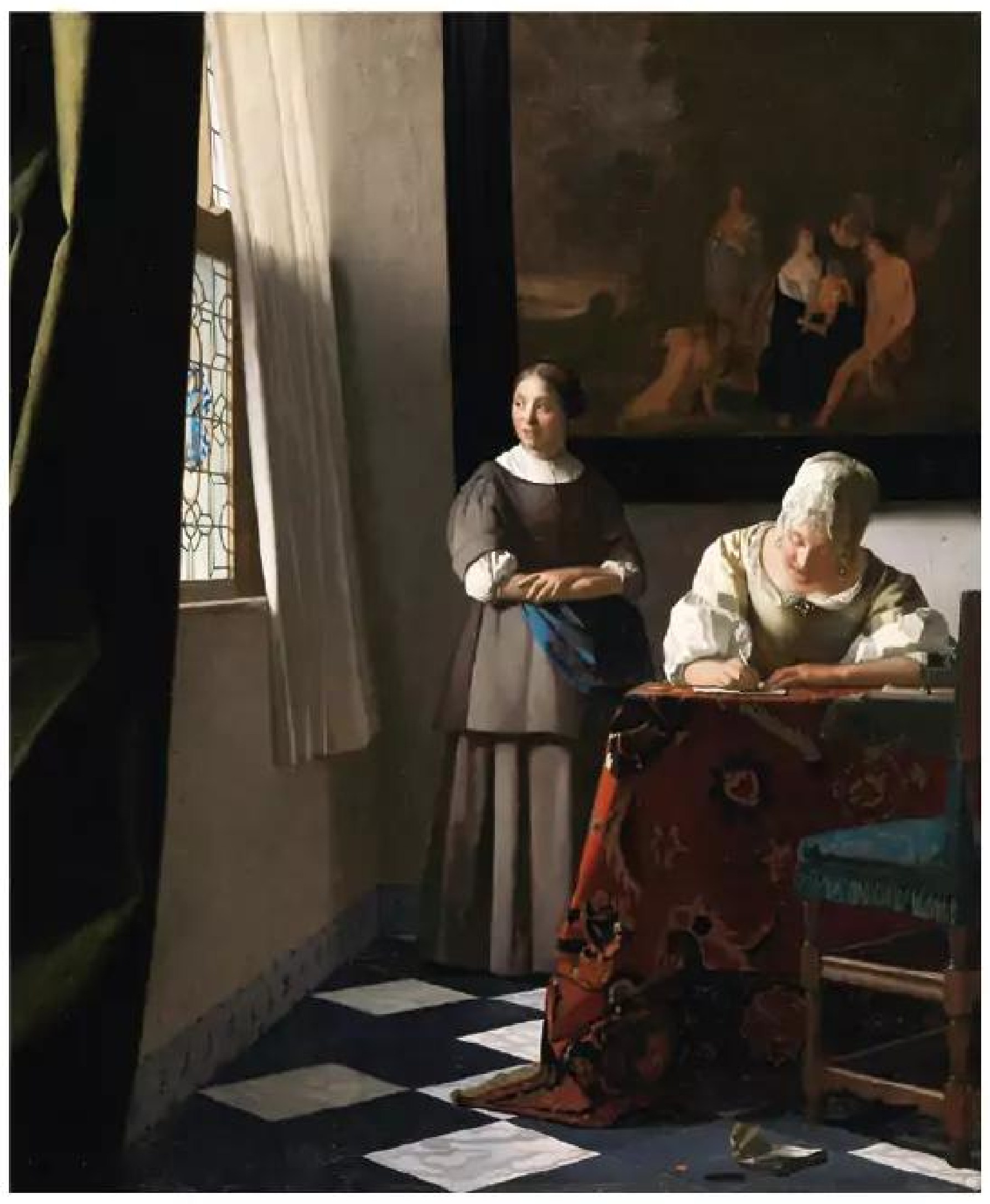
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris
25 June–11 January 2026

This exhibition pays homage to the French couturier and self-proclaimed 'King of Fashion', whose rejection of traditional garments – namely the corset – in favour of looser silhouttes transformed the way women dressed at the turn of the 20th century. More than 500 objects, including clothing, drawings produced in collaboration with artists and other decorative artefacts, chart Poiret's career, from his early days working under designer Jacques Doucet to his stints as both a perfumier and restaurateur.

10 Vermeer's Love Letters

Frick Collection,
New York City
18 June–8 September

Inaugurating the Frick Collection's new special exhibition galleries, this small but considered show presents three paintings by the Dutch master that are united by the simple, shared action of their subjects: letter writing.



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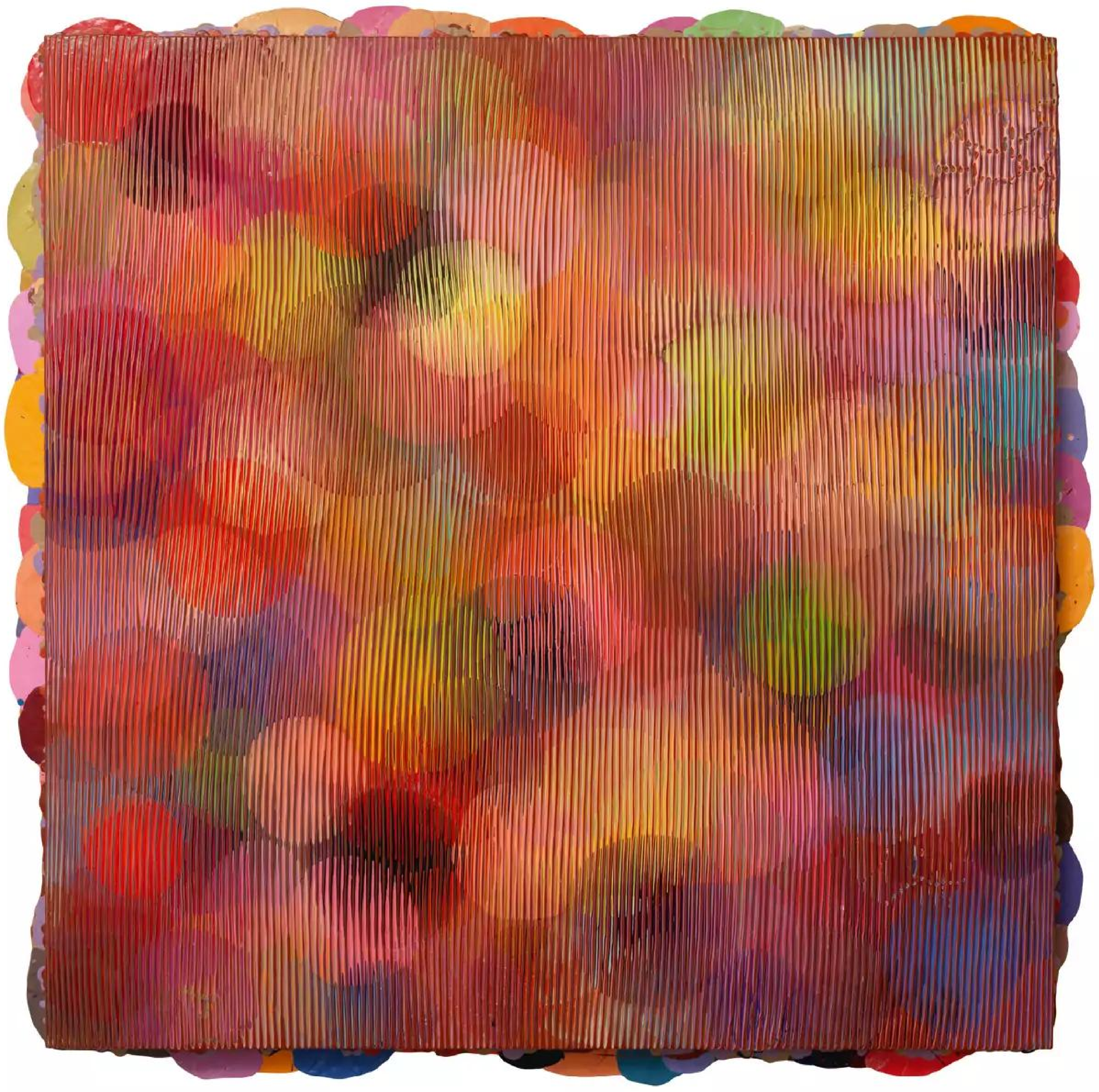
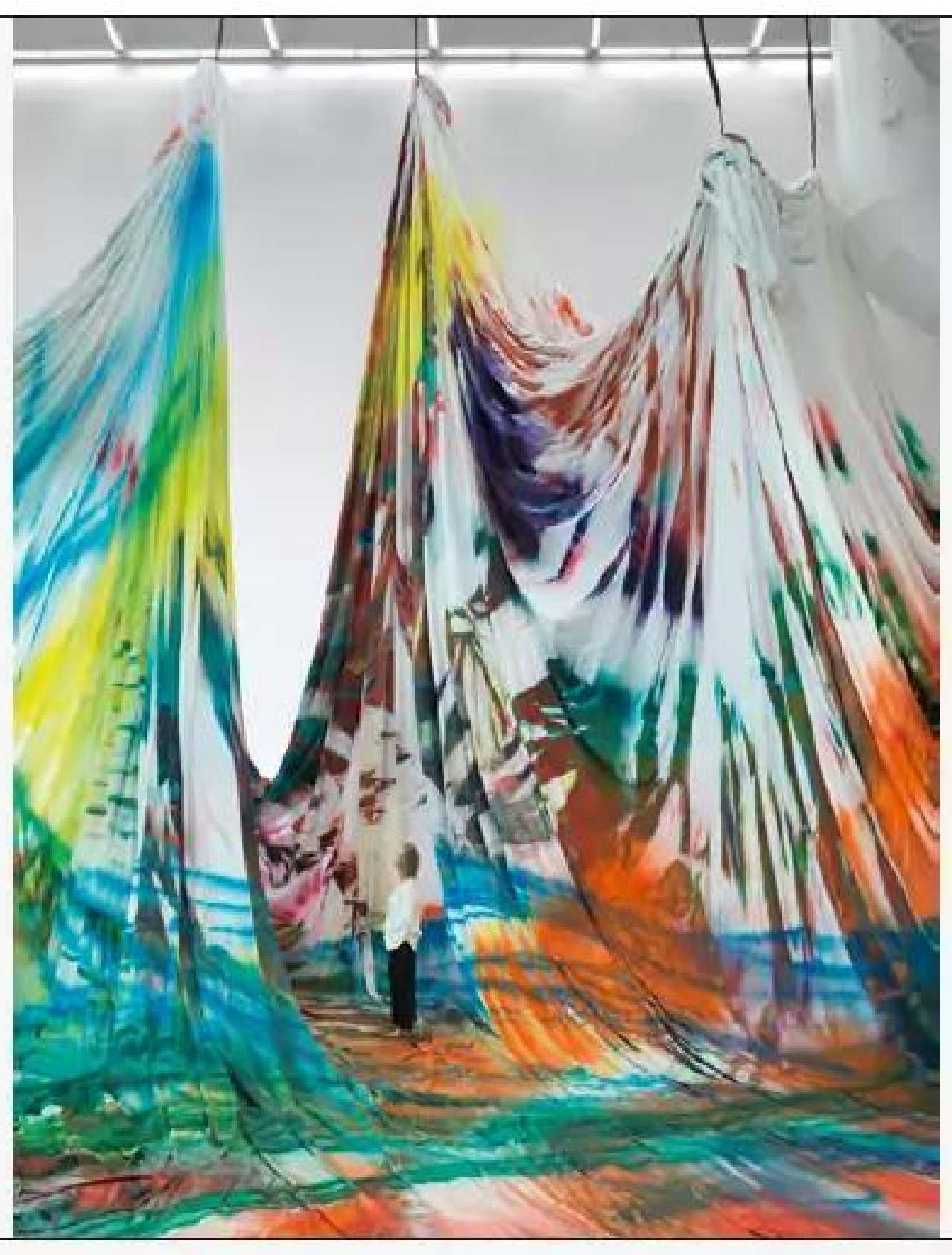
Art Basel

Bigger is better at the Swiss mega-fair, which this year features new sections, monumental installations and artworks that spill out into the surrounding area

Art Basel
Messe Basel
19–22 June

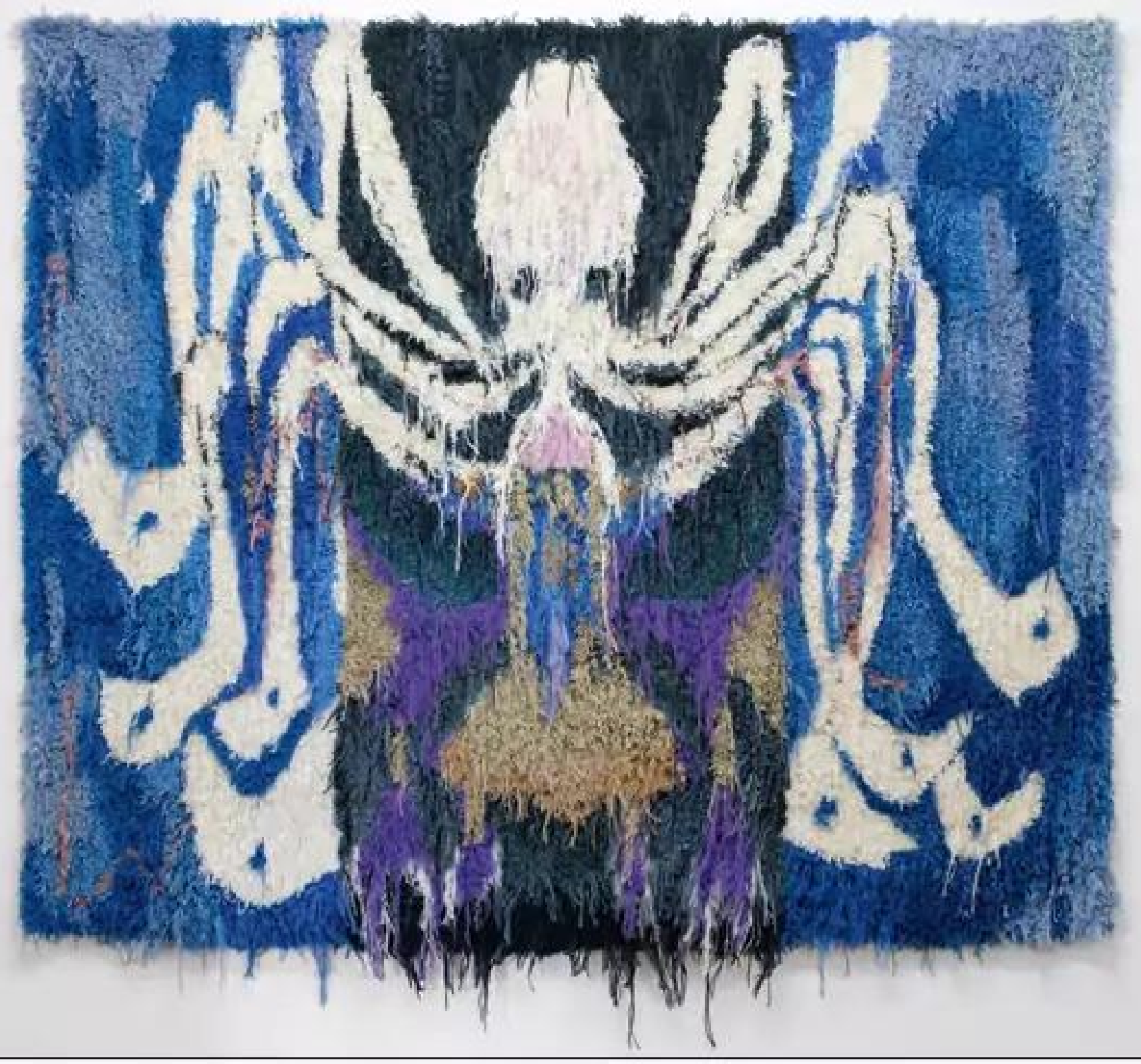
Art Basel continues its 2025 programme with its flagship fair, which this year welcomes 289 galleries from 42 countries. As usual, the fair is broken down into sections, some of which extend beyond the walls of the Messe centre: in Parcours, for example, Thaddaeus Ropac presents a video installation by Elaine Sturtevant in a public underpass. New to the fair is Premiere, in which 10 galleries will present works produced in the last five years by up to three artists.





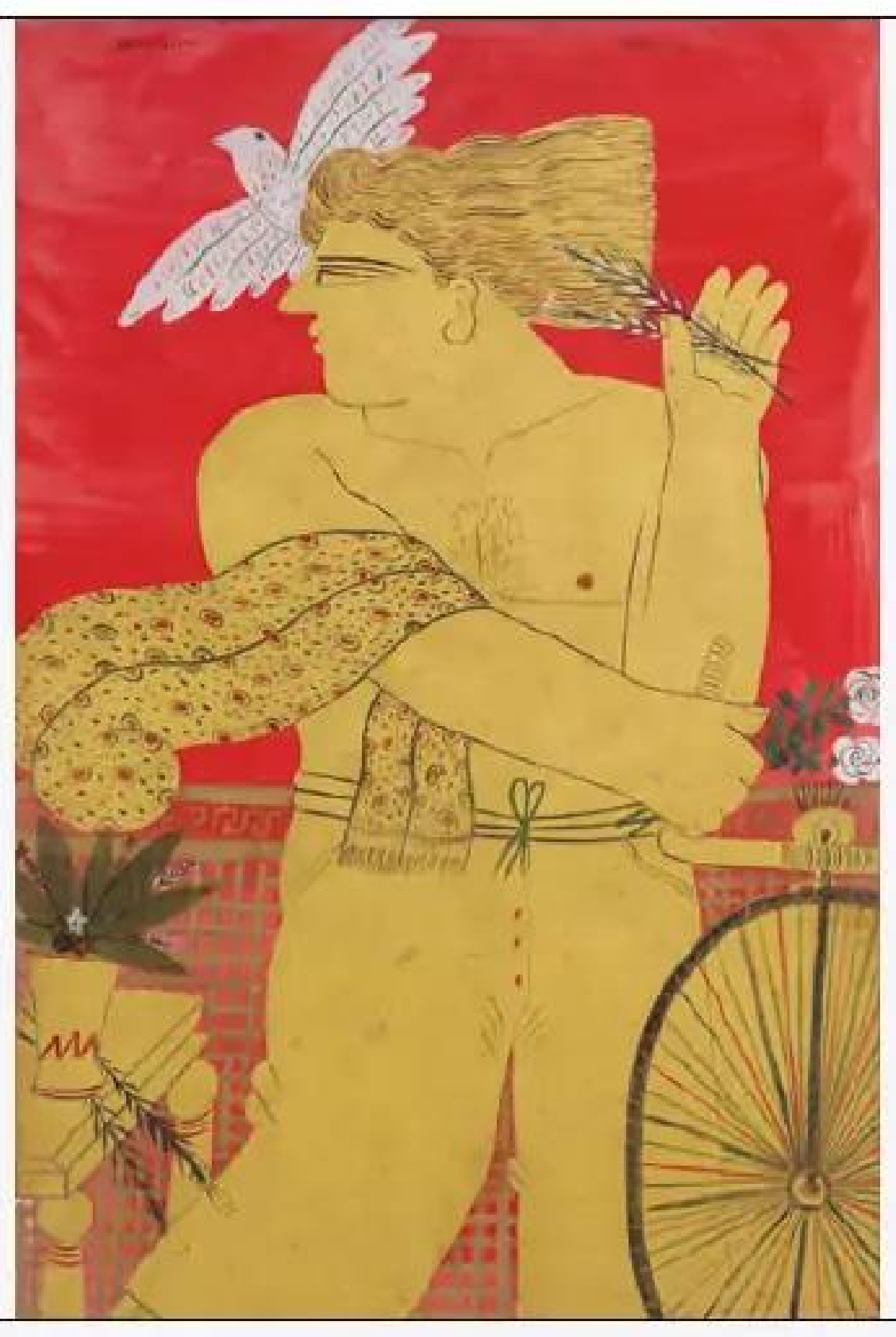
Messeplatz

The German artist Katharina Grosse has been commissioned to transform the Messeplatz and its surrounding buildings for this year's edition of the fair. It is an apt commission for the artist, who is used to working at scale and is best known for wielding her industrial spray gun to create immersive, site-specific installations that explode with colour and turn reality, as Grosse says, into 'something entirely liquid'.



Unlimited

As the name suggests, exhibitors in the Unlimited section are given full licence to go big: this is the space for towering sculptures, painting series that span several walls and large-scale video installations. Curated for the fifth year in a row by Giovanni Carmine, director of the Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, the section this year includes such highlights as Caroline Achaintre's two-metre-wide tufted wall hanging *Mastermind* (2024; pictured), presented by von Bartha.



Kabinett

Kabinett allows participating galleries to present a tightly curated exhibition based around a single artist or theme alongside their other offerings – a booth within a booth, if you will. Paris-based Galerie 1900–2000, for example, looks at the complex history of appropriation in art in a small display that features works by Marcel Duchamp, Sherrie Levine and the British multimedia artist Jonathan Monk, among others.

Courtesy Galerie Urs Meile/Ju Ting; © Ju Ting / Courtesy Centre Pompidou – Metz/Gagosian/Galerie Max Hetzler/Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder; © Adagp, Paris 2024 / Courtesy von Bartha/Caroline Achaintre; © Caroline Achaintre / Photo: Jackson White; courtesy Herald St, London/Alekos Fassianos; © Alekos Fassianos

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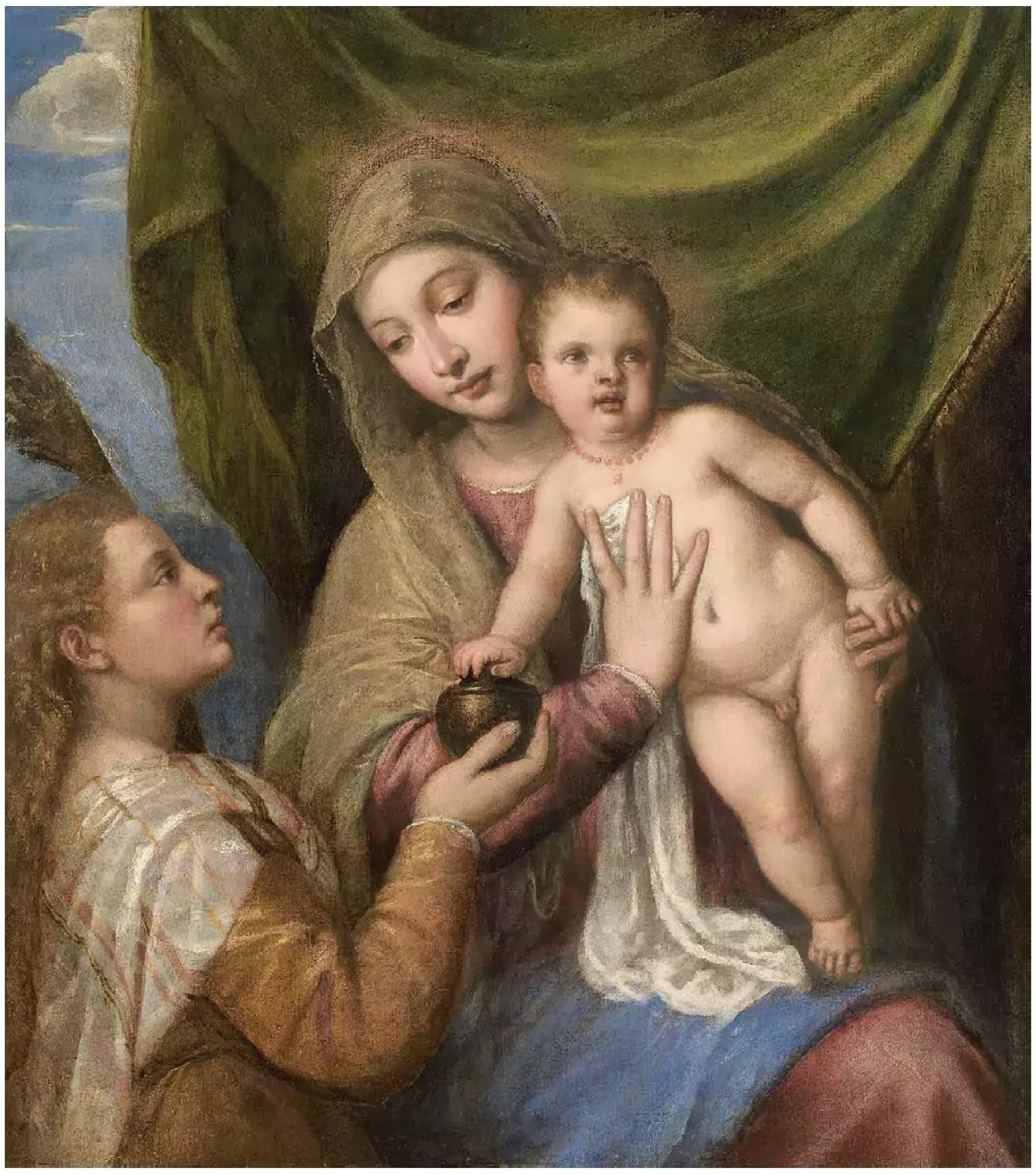
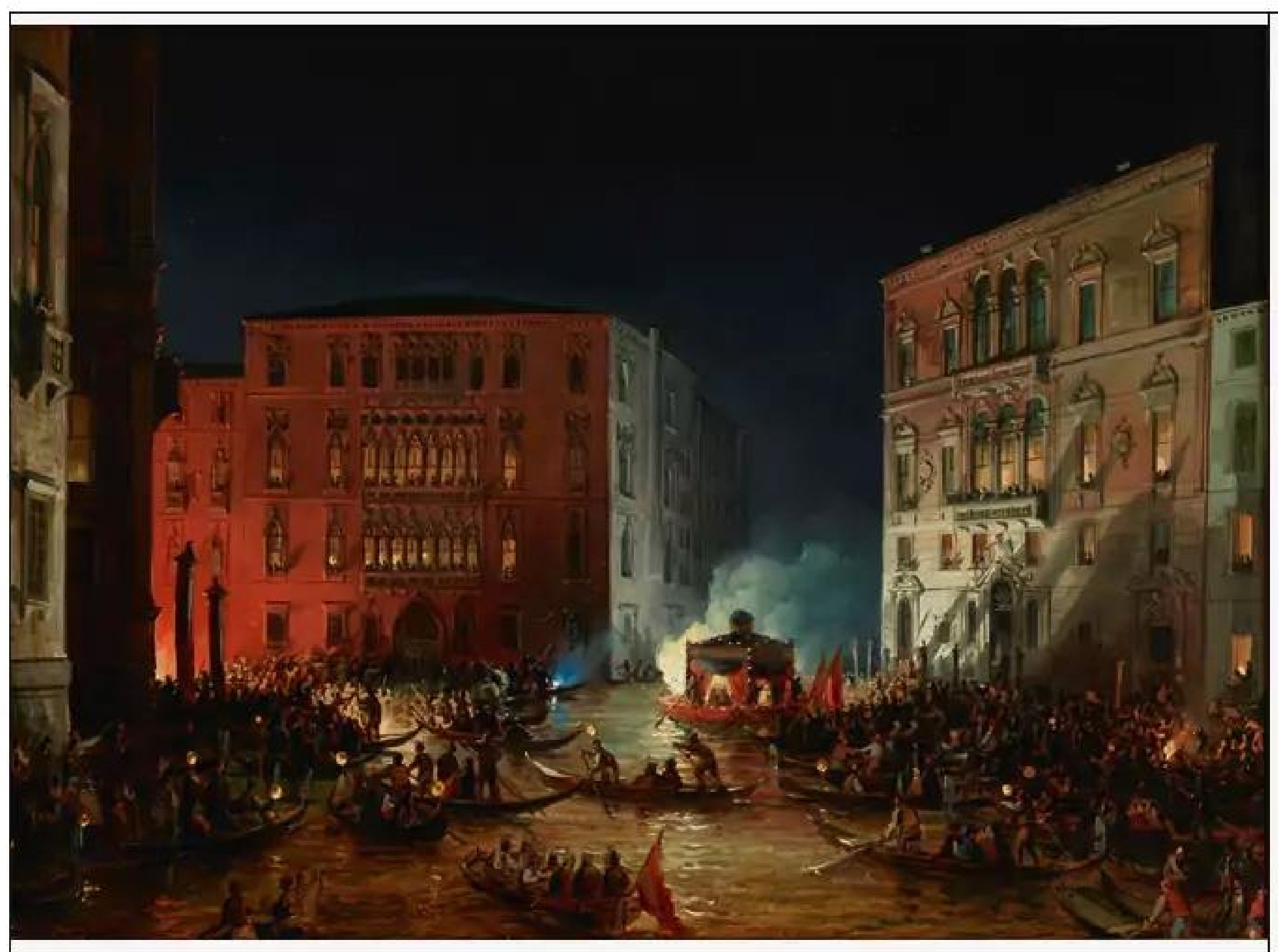
Classic Art London

For the event's inaugural edition, galleries around Mayfair and St James's are showing off their wares, from Titians to Turners

Classic Art London
Various locations
23 June–4 July

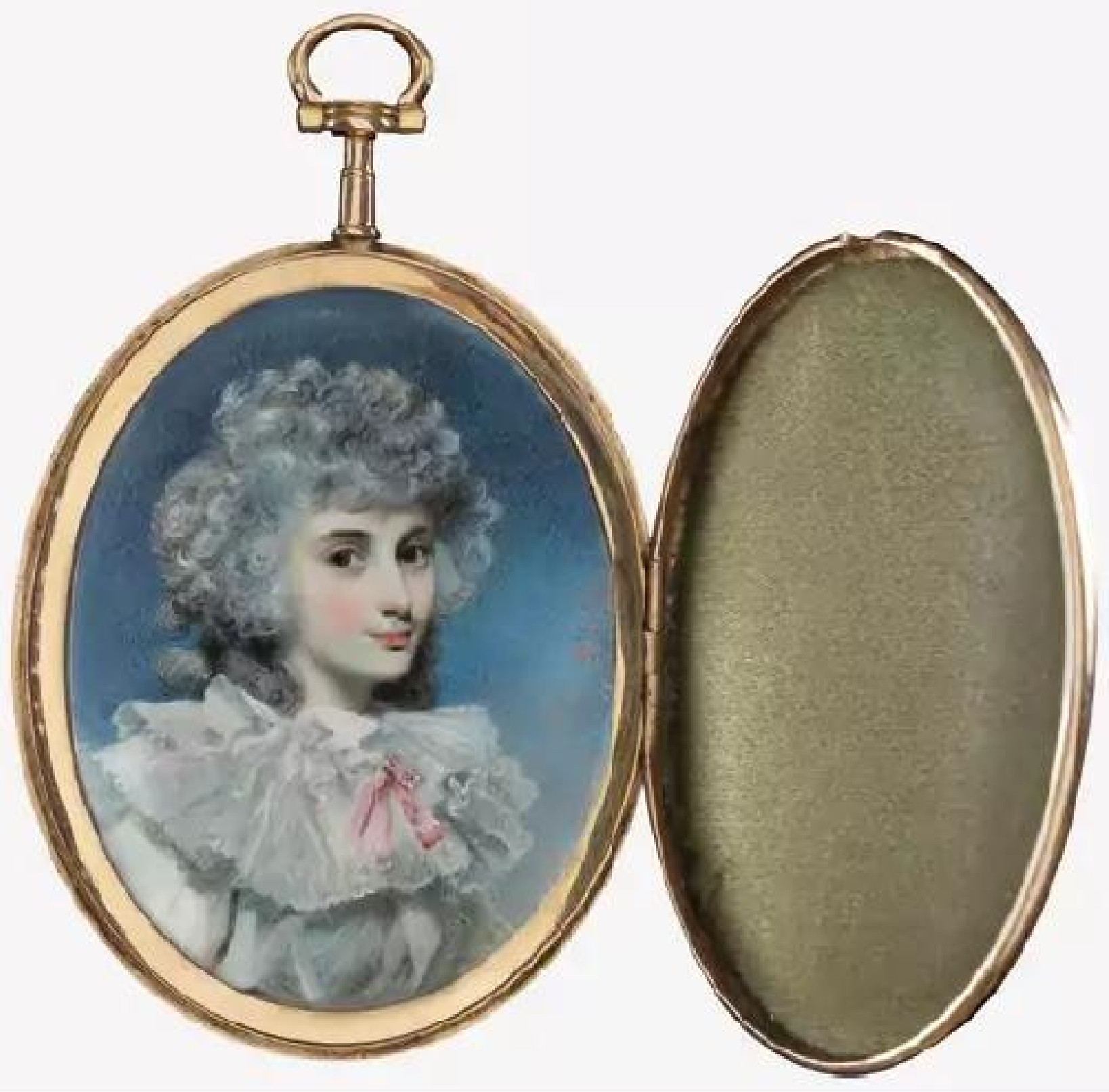
Following the cancellation of London Art Week last December, Classic Art London has taken up the mantle as the city's new event for dealers in modern and Old Masters. Coinciding with London's summer auctions, its inaugural edition will involve exhibitions across Mayfair and St James's, including a display at Trinity Fine Art of this rediscovered Titian, *Madonna and Child with St Mary Magdalene* (1555–60). The programme also includes talks and panel discussions on topics ranging from climate change to the growing number of private museums. Other highlights are below.





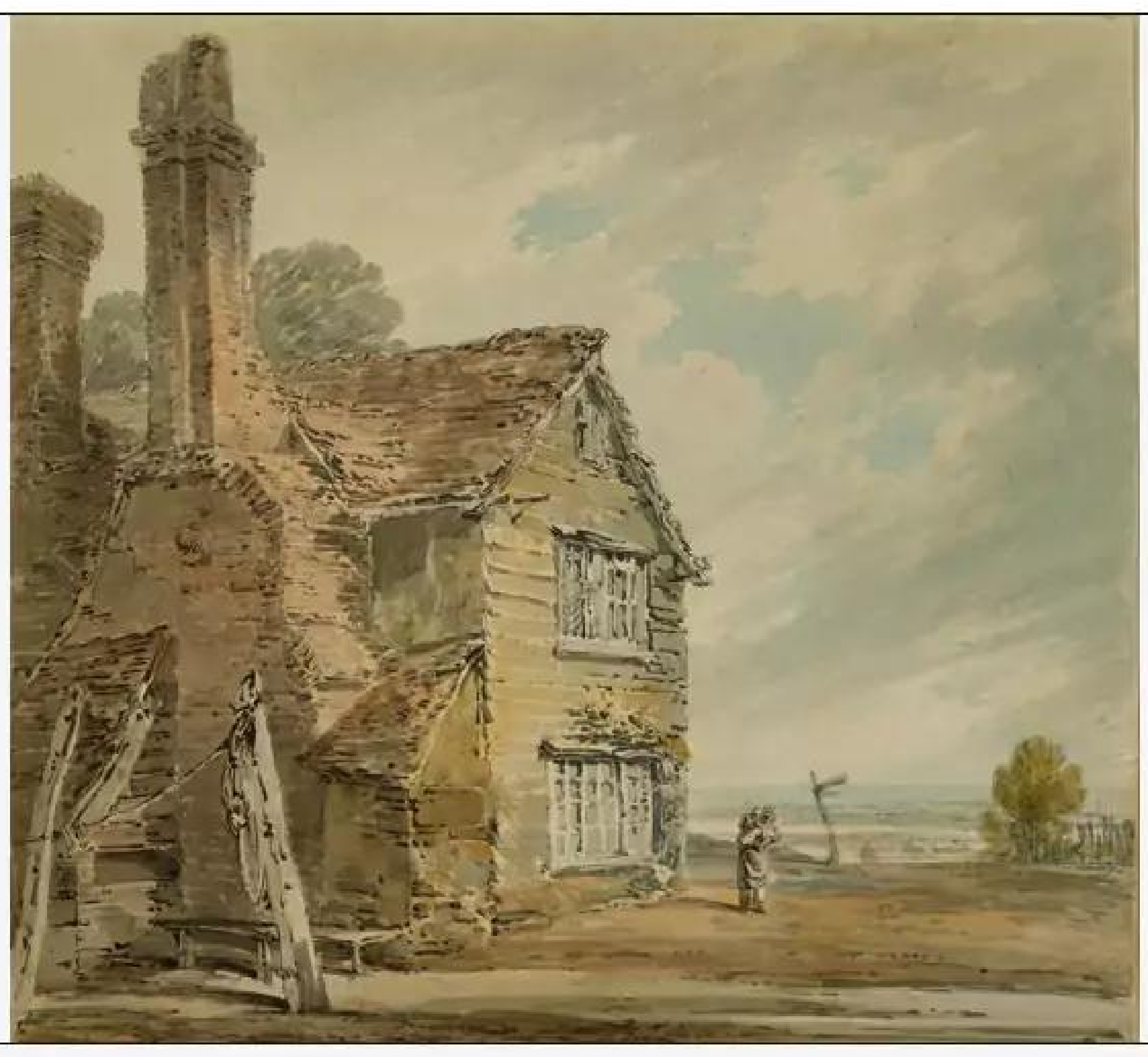
Charles Beddington Ltd

One of the highlights in an exhibition of *vedute* that depict upheavals in 19th-century Venice is this tenebristic painting by Carlo Grubacs, *Venice: The Volta di Canal at Night with the Festivities in Honour of Emperor Ferdinand I of Austria, 7th October, 1838* (n.d.). It depicts a barge carrying Ferdinand I, King of Lombardy-Venetia, who would flee the city in 1848 as Venetians demanded the end of Austrian rule.



The Limner Company

A collection of antique miniatures by artists including George Engleheart takes centre stage at the Mason's Yard gallery. The painter's intricately detailed portraits of aristocrats, including this pastel-hued *Portrait miniature of Lady Betty (Elizabeth) Foster (née Hervey) (later Cavendish) (1757–1824)*, which he produced in the 1780s, made him one of the most successful and sought-after miniaturists of the Georgian era.



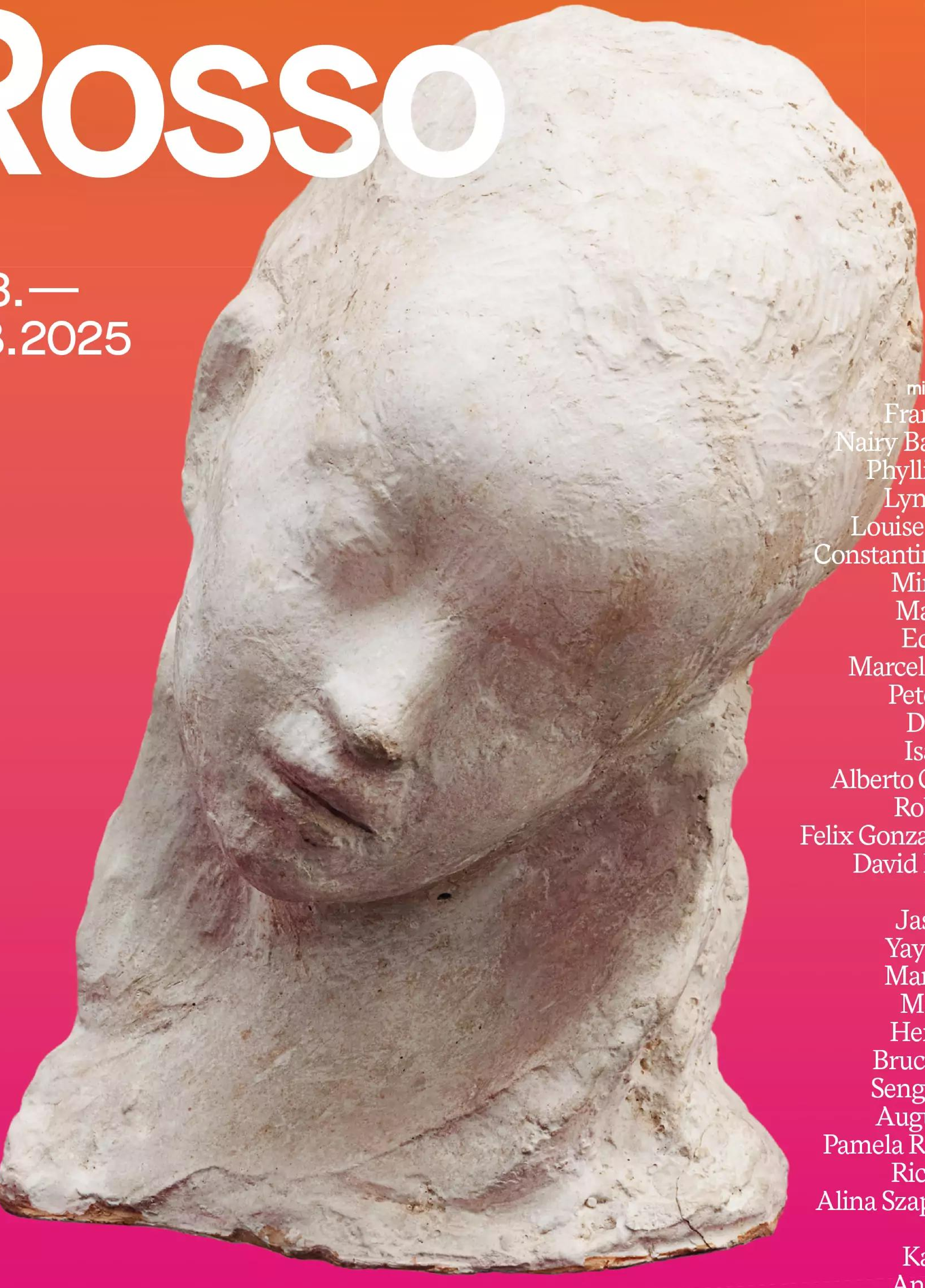
Guy Peppiatt Fine Art

J.M.W. Turner – who was born 250 years ago – is the most celebrated British artist of the 19th century. He was also one of the most prolific, producing an estimated 32,000 works, the vast majority of which are owned by the Tate. However, early sketches by the artist still come to market, such as this watercolour, *The Poorhouse at Hadley, Hertfordshire* (*c.* 1794), which was painted when he was just 19.

Courtesy Trinity Fine Art, London / Courtesy Charles Beddington Ltd, London / Courtesy the Limner Company, London / Courtesy Guy Peppiatt Fine Art, London

Medardo Rosso

29.3.—
10.8.2025



Medardo Rosso, *Bambino malato*, 1895, Museo Medardo Rosso, Barzio, photo: mumok, Markus Wörgötter

mit / with / avec

Francis Bacon
Nairy Baghramian
Phyllida Barlow
Lynda Benglis
Louise Bourgeois
Constantin Brâncuși
Miriam Cahn
Mary Cassatt
Edgar Degas
Marcel Duchamp
Peter Fischli / David Weiss
Isa Genzken
Alberto Giacometti
Robert Gober
Felix Gonzalez-Torres
David Hammons
Eva Hesse
Jasper Johns
Yayoi Kusama
Maria Lassnig
Marisa Merz
Henry Moore
Bruce Nauman
Senga Nengudi
Auguste Rodin
Pamela Rosenkranz
Richard Serra
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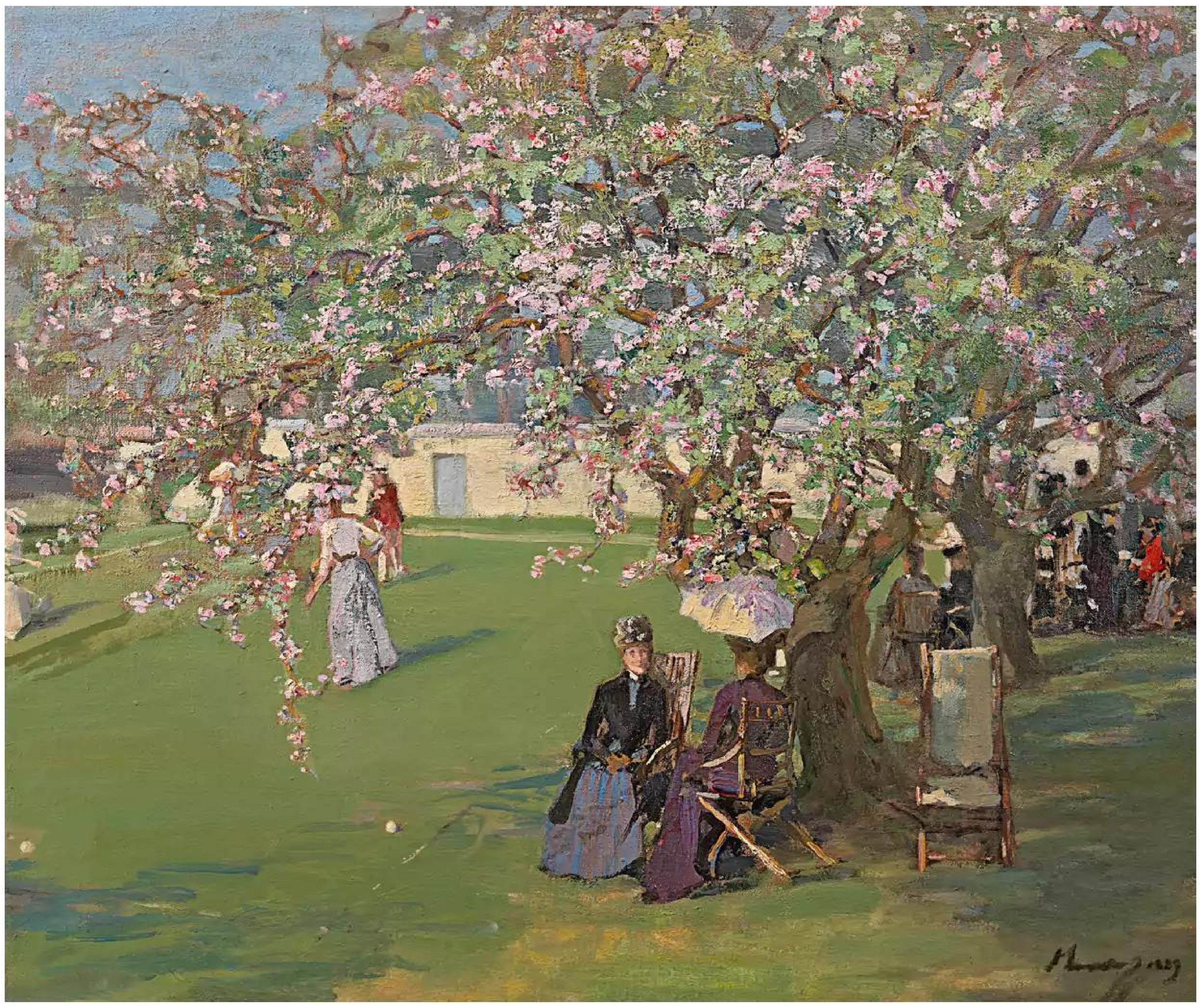
VISITFLANDERS

Treasure House Fair

With everything from sculptures to supercars on show, the summer event promises opulence and a carnival atmosphere, writes *Michael Delgado*



1. *The Paisley Lawn Tennis Club*, 1889, Sir John Lavery (1856–1941), oil on canvas, 63.5 × 76.2cm. Richard Green, London

While Treasure House Fair is holding its third edition this year, one of its founders, Thomas Woodham-Smith, seems to have some of the great London fairs of the past on his mind. 'We walk in the shadow of Masterpiece, and also of the Grosvenor House Antiques Fair,' he says. Of course, he is also one of those involved in founding Masterpiece in 2009. When the fair – then under the ownership of MCH Group, which also owns Art Basel – folded at the start of 2023, he and his colleague Harry Van der Hoorn were quick to set up this successor. Returning this year to the Royal Hospital Chelsea – which also hosted Masterpiece – Treasure House is designed to be at once 'very commercial' and a 'cultural, gastronomic, alcoholic event' which harnesses the 'magic pixie dust of London in the summer'.

Some 70 dealers and exhibitors, both established and newcomers, are arriving at Treasure House this year, bringing a range of antiques, decorative arts, paintings and more that includes the usual displays of antique silver, porcelain, jewellery, furniture and so forth, seasoned with some more curious pieces, among which is a drawing of a boat made by King Charles III as a child, from Robert Young Antiques. Several exhibitors are making their debuts this year, including AtKris Studio, a young Dutch gallery exhibiting in the UK for the first time, with a collection of 20th-century Italian furniture and decorative arts, by Gio Ponti and others.

This edition also includes a non-selling exhibition, 'The Brilliant Bugattis', curated by the sculpture expert Edward Horswell. Taking in some of Ettore Bugatti's pioneering cars, as well as bronze sculptures produced by his brother Rembrandt and their father Carlo's furniture designs, the show speaks to Woodham-Smith's passion for 'cross-generational stories'. So too does a, exhibition by Mica Bowman, who is showing contemporary sculptures alongside the 19th-century works brought by her father, the Rodin expert Robert Bowman. This, for Woodham-Smith, is key to the ethos of the fair: celebrating the greats but also 'the new masters […] the treasures of the future'.

While part of the appeal for dealers is 'the draw of London as a trading hub' – around a third of exhibitors are from abroad – for punters, the fair is designed to be a 'cultural package'. This year, Treasure House is expanding its sculpture walk with a display of everything from 18th-century bronzes to contemporary works that meanders through the Royal Hospital and out into the gardens. 'We like giving people what they want rather than telling them what they want,' Woodham-Smith says, and while a 'visually impactful' bar-cum-kitchen-cum-art-experience, for instance, may not be what everyone wants, the variety of Treasure House means that there is sure to be something to satisfy the pickiest customers. There is certainly no denying Woodham-Smith's enthusiasm, his relentlessly can-do attitude. 'If an opportunity came up to move the whole thing to Mars, we'd find a way,' he tells me – and I think I believe him. Ⓐ

Treasure House Fair takes place at the Royal Hospital Chelsea, London, from 26 June–1 July (treasurehousefair.com).

Courtesy Richard Green

Gallery highlights

Cindy Sherman: The Women
23 June–26 October
Hauser & Wirth, Menorca

There is a pleasing irony in staging an exhibition of an artist so interested in ugliness at Hauser & Wirth's most picturesque space. The first Sherman show in Spain for more than 20 years includes the series *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–80), in which Sherman photographed herself posing as stock film characters from the 1950s and '60s, as well as some of her more unsettling work which makes use of prosthetics, heavy make-up and digital manipulation.

Gabriel Rico:
A Finger Pointing to the Moon
12 June–1 August
Perrotin, New York

The Mexican artist began collecting discarded objects as a child and has put assemblage at the centre of his art, which probes the boundary between humans and nature. This show at Perrotin includes his latest series – wall works inspired by *nierika*, Indigenous ritual objects made using beads and painted yarn – as well as a wry homage to Maurizio Cattelan's infamous banana-based work *Comedian* (2019).

Aubrey Levinthal: Mirror Matter
28 June–13 September
Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh

There is an almost childlike quality to the work of the Philadelphia-based painter, but it is that seeming simplicity that makes her canvases worth a second look. The enigmatic poses and facial expressions of her figures, who are often cast in everyday situations – having lunch, sitting on the sofa, in bed – seem to resist interpretation (Fig. 2). Ingleby Gallery is mounting Levinthal's first major exhibition in the UK, featuring works from the past decade.

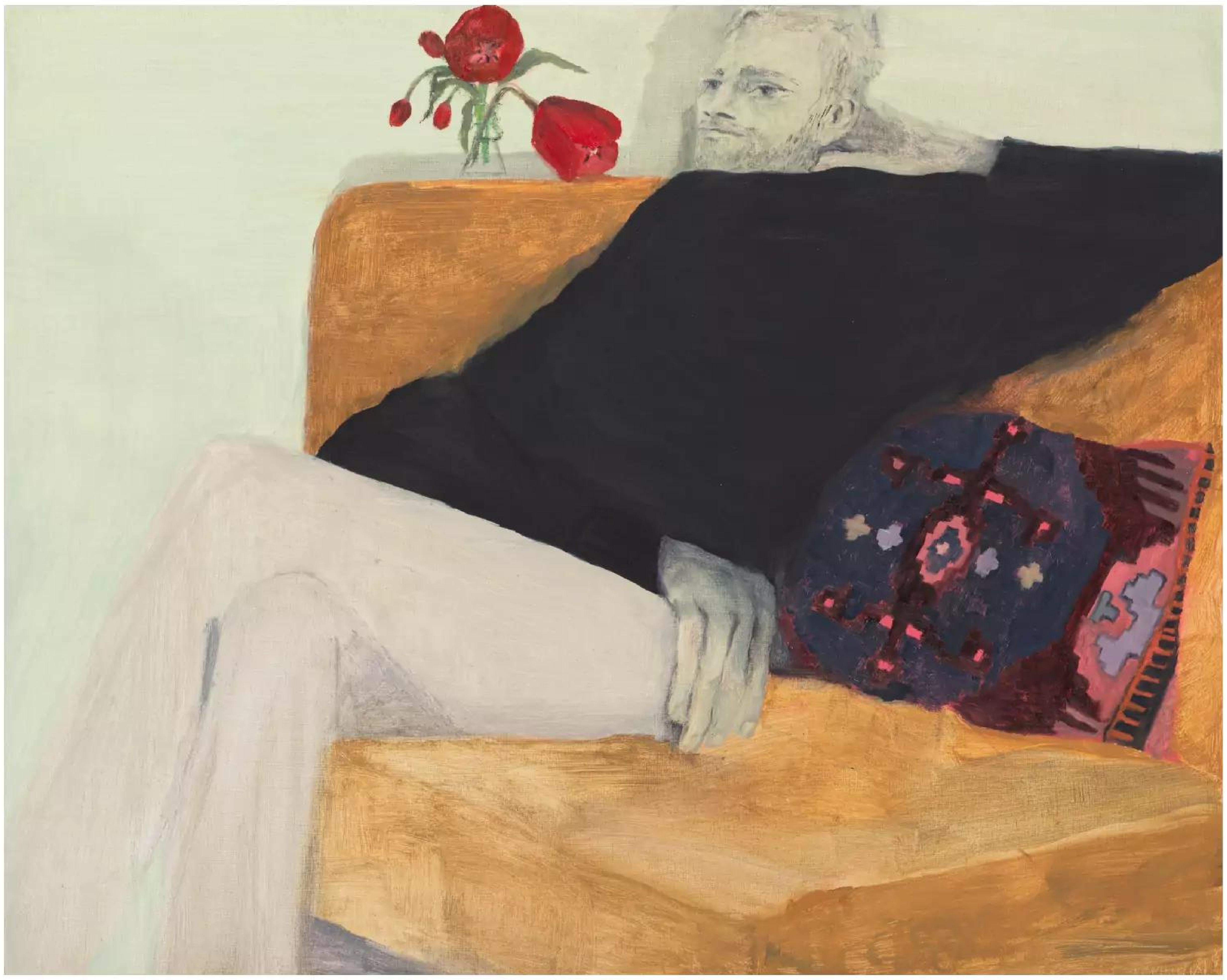
Paul Thek: Seized by Joy
Until 2 August
Thomas Dane Gallery, London

If Thek is not as widely known as some of the cultural figures he associated with in the 1960s and '70s, such as Peter Hujar and Susan Sontag, this is partly down to the fact that much of his sculptural work was designed to be ephemeral and therefore no longer exists. His sculptures tended towards the bold and fleshy; his paintings, the subject of this retrospective, are more meditative and include gentle seascapes and city views.

Fair in focus

Trois Crayons: Tracing Time
26 June–5 July
No. 9 Cork Street, London

Set up in 2023 by Alesa Boyle, Tom Nevile and Sebastien Paraskevas, Trois Crayons is a platform geared towards promoting the appreciation of drawings and works on paper and 'demystifying' the process of buying them – especially Old Master drawings, which are usually less difficult to acquire than paintings. For the second year running, Trois Crayons is hosting a selling exhibition at No. 9 Cork Street, in which works hang side by side rather than being split among exhibitor booths. Thirty-five galleries will be showing some 250 works (twice as many as last year), including studies for paintings, designs for clothes and more, as well as standalone works. As a whole, the event shows the full range of what drawing can be: compare a simple line drawing of a skeleton by Gustav Klimt (John Swarbrooke Fine Art) to a vividly colourful beach scene by Pierre Bonnard, on show with Ambroise Duchemin, an elaborate collection of fools drawn by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (Stephen Ongpin Fine Art), or an Italian study for animals on blue paper, brought by Day & Faber, which dates to the late 15th century.



2. *Couch with Man*, 2025, Aubrey Levinthal (b. 1986), oil on panel, 61 × 76.2cm

Photo: Neighboring States; courtesy the artist/Ingleby, Edinburgh; © the artist

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Illustrated: Edmund Blampied, *Colour Symphony* (detail), 1928, 350 x 250 mm (Lowell Libson & Jonny Yarker Ltd)

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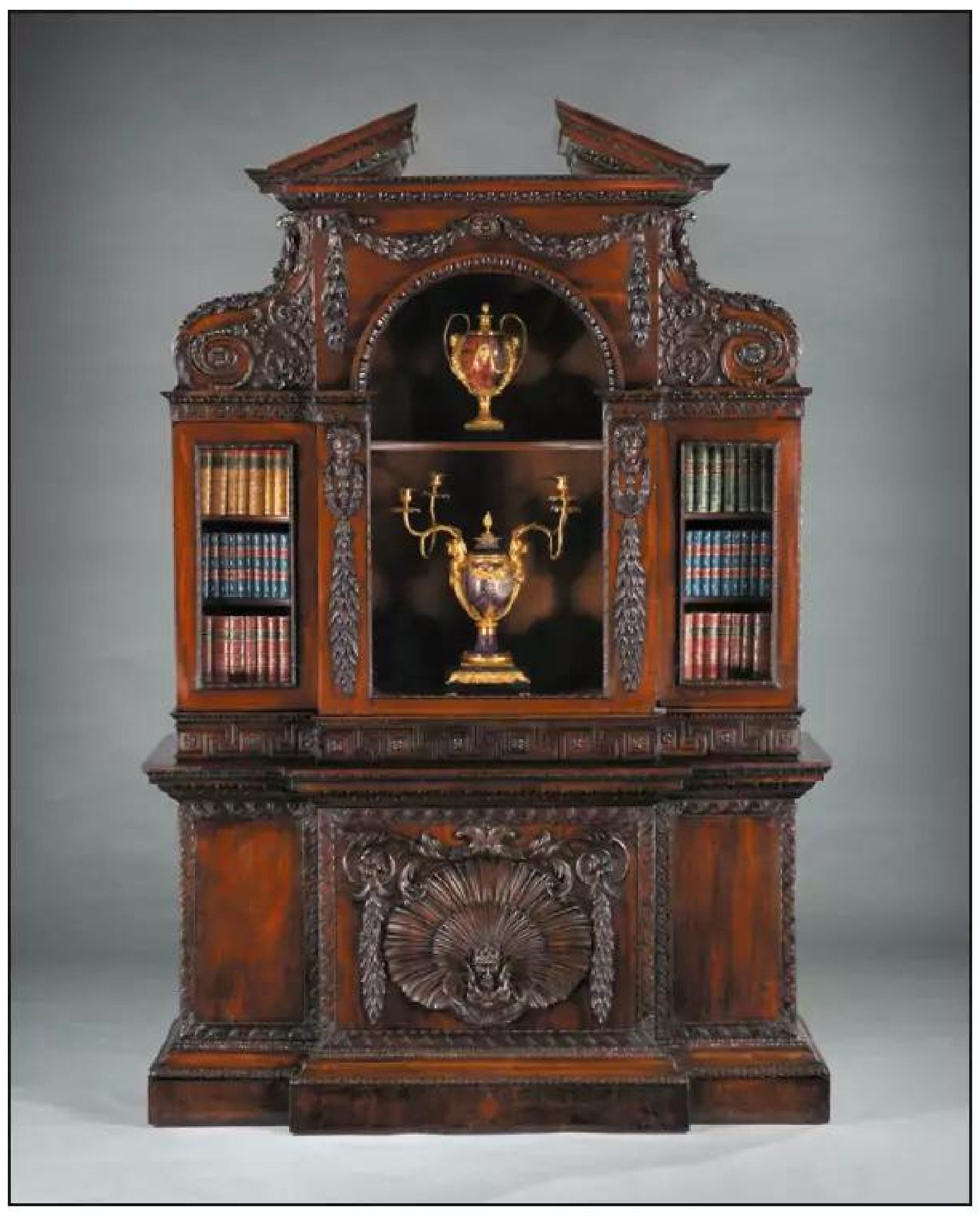

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In Perspective

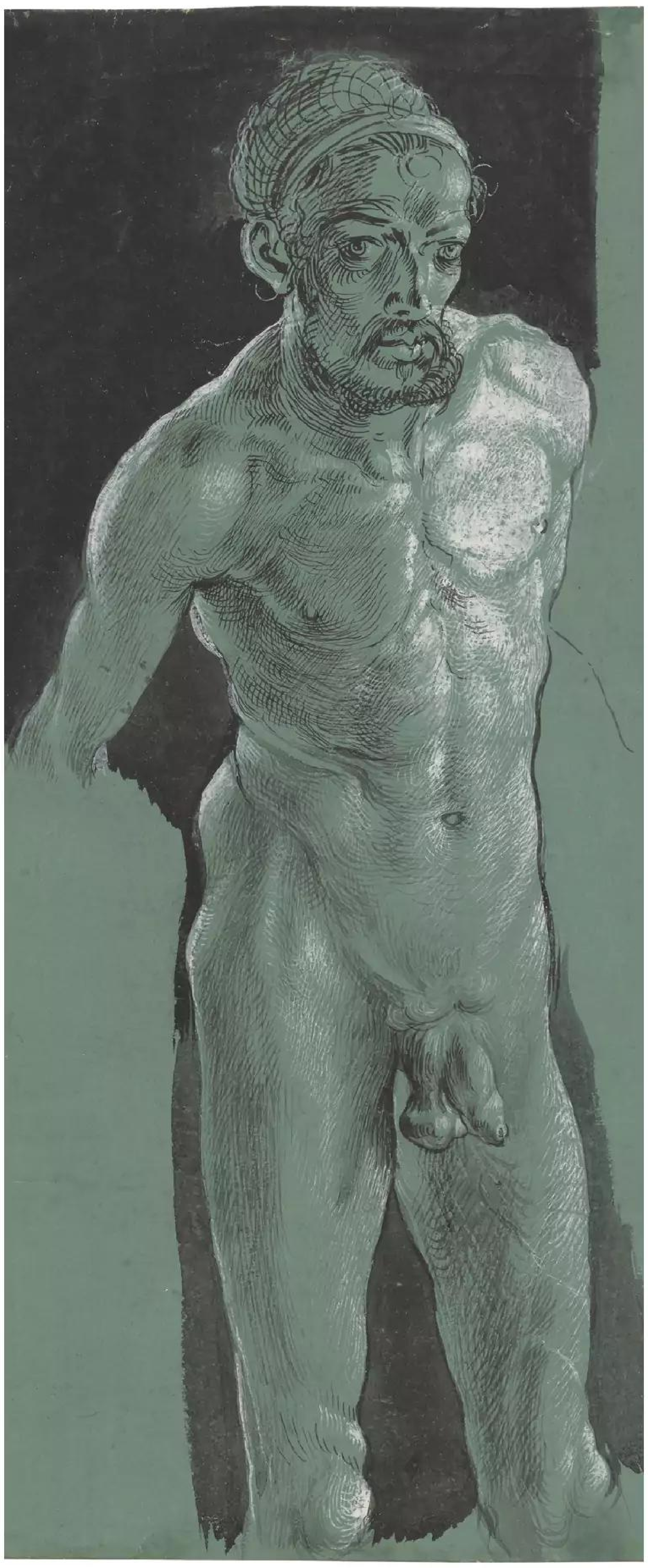
Nude behaviour

Hettie Judah on the artists who have bared it all, imperfectly

The cover of the first copy of this magazine carried the divine profile of the marble sculpture known as the *Apollo Belvedere*, a fitting motif for a mag that (at the time) covered both art and music. Question Apollo's musical supremacy at your peril – Marsyas paid for such hubris with his skin. Considered the epitome of male beauty, the god inspired the earliest nudes in Greek art. Sculptures of Apollo from the early fifth century BC mark the emergence of a physical ideal that would endure for thousands of years: a carapace of muscle cladding the torso that transitions into the legs through deep iliac furrows.

The physical perfection of Apollo was mathematic in expression, marking him out as a divine being in human form. In the 18th century, the *Apollo Belvedere* was considered one of the greatest works in human history, caressed by the velvet prose of the art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann: 'In gazing upon this masterpiece of art, I forget all else, and I myself adopt an elevated stance, in order to be worthy of gazing upon it. My chest seems to expand with veneration and to heave like those I have seen swollen as if by the spirit of prophecy…' Thanks to this status, the *Apollo Belvedere* was looted from the Vatican Museum by Napoleon and installed in the Louvre, where it remained for 17 years. Until the early 20th century, it topped the list of plaster casts required for study of the figure at art schools and museums.

By the mid 20th century, the *Apollo Belvedere* had fallen from favour. In *The Nude* (1956), Kenneth Clark reminded readers that this supposed masterpiece was a Roman copy in marble after a lost Greek bronze, pointing out its 'weak structure' and 'slack surface'. Not for Clark these Roman cover versions – in his view everything had gone downhill since Praxiteles carved his Aphrodite at Cnidos in the fourth century BC. 'The drift of all popular art is towards the lowest common denominator,' Clark lamented, 'and there are more women whose bodies look like a potato than like the Cnidian Venus.' As to whether there are more men whose bodies look like a potato than like a Praxiteles Apollo, the great art historian declines to comment.

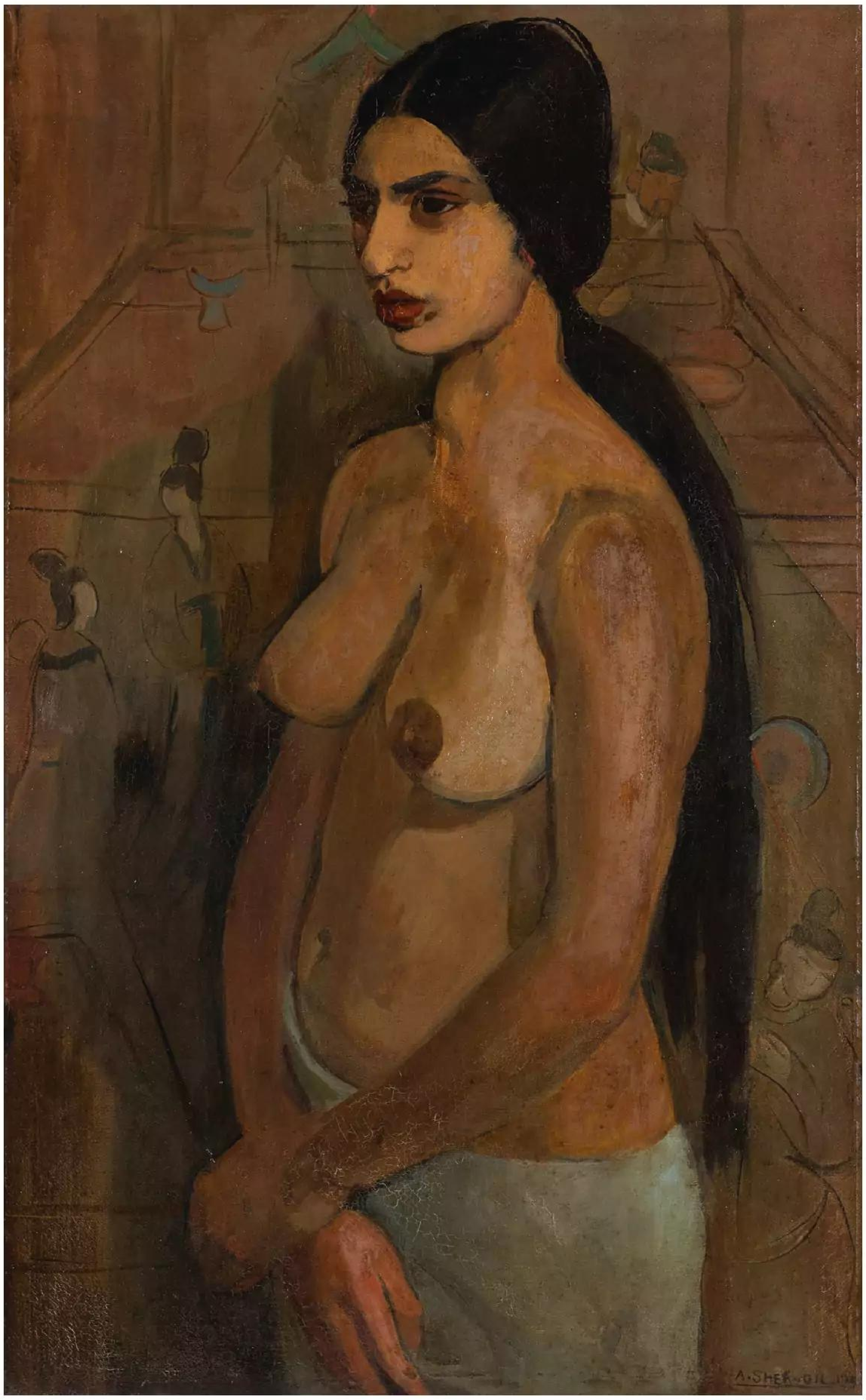


1. *Nude Self-Portrait*, *c.* 1509, Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), pen, brush and ink on green paper, 29.5 × 15.5cm. Klassik Stiftung Weimar

Photo: © Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Museen

The tuberous-bodied of this world are often naked in art, rather than nude, appearing as individuals, rather than ideals. We, the potato people, have bodies that are particular. Mortal, our conformation does not abide by the supposedly divine geometry of canonical proportions. For artists, scrutiny of the body in the mirror can reveal the fascinating vegetable truth. Albrecht Dürer first used a mirror (then a rare and precious device) to draw a self-portrait in 1484, when he was 13. Twenty-five years later he stared at his reflection with rather more intense scrutiny while drawing himself naked (Fig. 1). Dürer thought deeply (and restlessly) about aesthetics, classical proportions and the idea that beauty might abide by fixed parameters.

While his *Four Books on Human Proportion* (1528) provided schemata for different body types, he rejected the idea that beauty could be achieved through a formula: it had to be drawn from life: 'Without true knowledge, who will give us a reliable standard? I believe there is no one alive capable of perceiving the ultimate ideal of beauty embodied in the least of living creatures, let alone in a human being.' Dürer does not look unpleased with the naked figure gazing back at him



2. *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, 1934, Amrita Sher-Gil (1913–41), oil on canvas, 88.4 × 55.1cm. Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

from the mirror. He's a handsome, muscular, man in his late 30s. He observes, intently, the impact of gravity on his genitals, and is unsparing of his lumpy love-handle and wayward knees.

This was a necessarily private work, but in drawing his potato self, Dürer was, in so many words, escaping the tyranny of Apollo. He portrayed his curious body as it was revealed to him through observation.

When Amrita Sher-Gil (1913–41) painted her mirror image more than four centuries later, she too was performing defiance, both social and aesthetic. In *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian* (1934; Fig. 2) she stands stripped to the hips, her lower body wrapped in a length of cloth. Sher-Gil was 21, just concluding her studies at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In the city's museums and galleries, depictions of 'the nude' (nameless, female, object-like) abounded to the degree that this subject, with its modernist associations with prostitution and wayward bohemianism, amounted to an obsession. In part, Sher-Gil's self-portrait is a double tribute to Paul Gauguin and Vincent Van Gogh. She stands in three-quarter profile before a Japanese print or screen – a position and aesthetic reference familiar from Van Gogh's self-portraits. As a 'Tahitian' she steps into the role of Gauguin's dark-skinned young women, mute objects of the gaze. The shadowy figure of a man in dark clothing hovers behind her – perhaps Gauguin himself?

As a young Hungarian-Indian woman, Sher-Gil felt an outsider: Indian in Europe, European in India, female in a forbiddingly male-dominated field. Her homage to Gauguin and Van Gogh is heartfelt but it is also subversive. She has inserted her naked body, rendered according to her own observation and skill, into the exotic fantasy realms that informed their work. She is the foreign 'other' and a sexual being, but she is also the author of her own portrait, a naked woman defying the idealised nude, her beauty human rather than divine.

Hettie Judah is the curator of 'Acts of Creation: On Art and Motherhood', at Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee, until 13 July.

Courtesy the Estate of Amrita Sher-Gil

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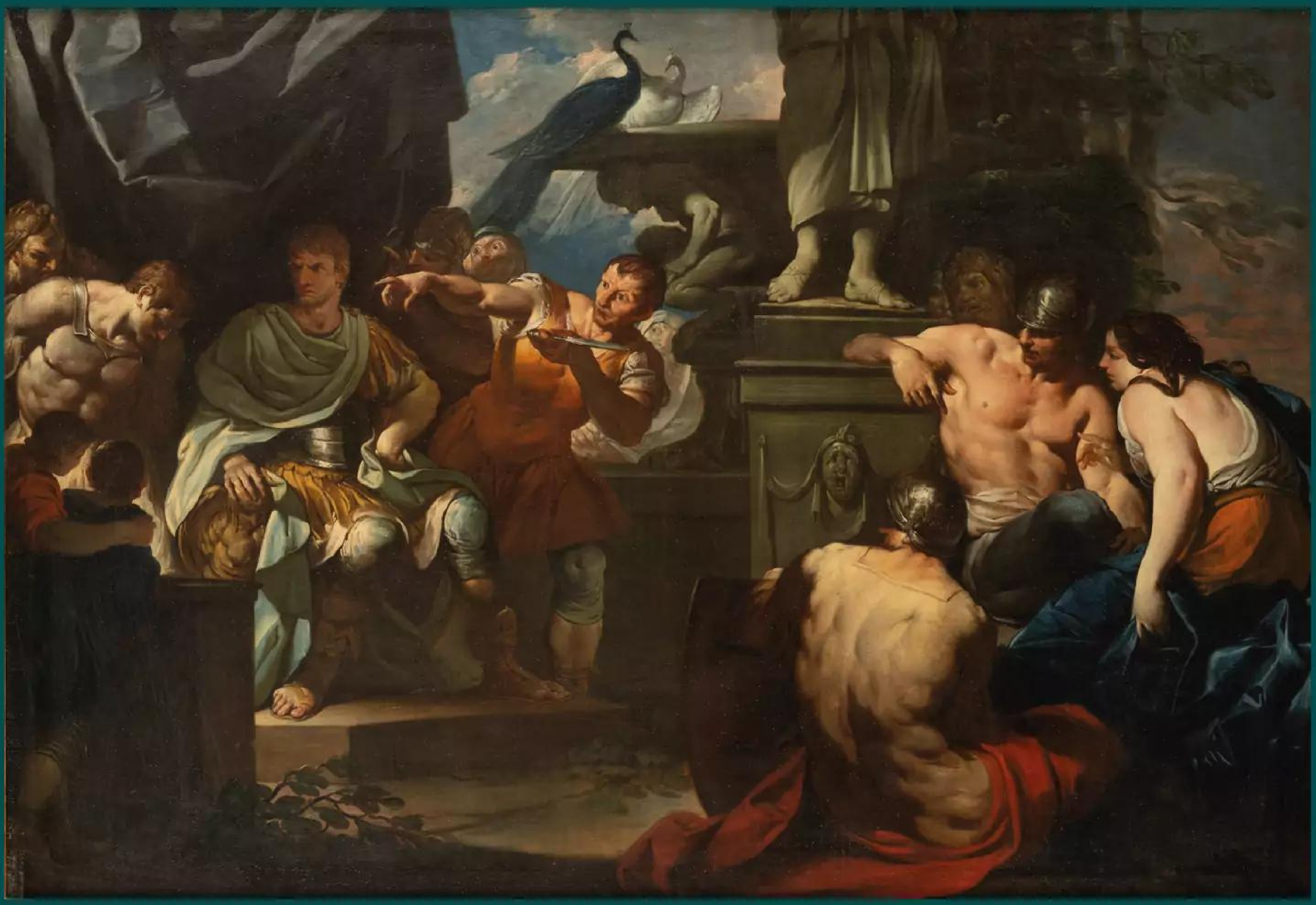

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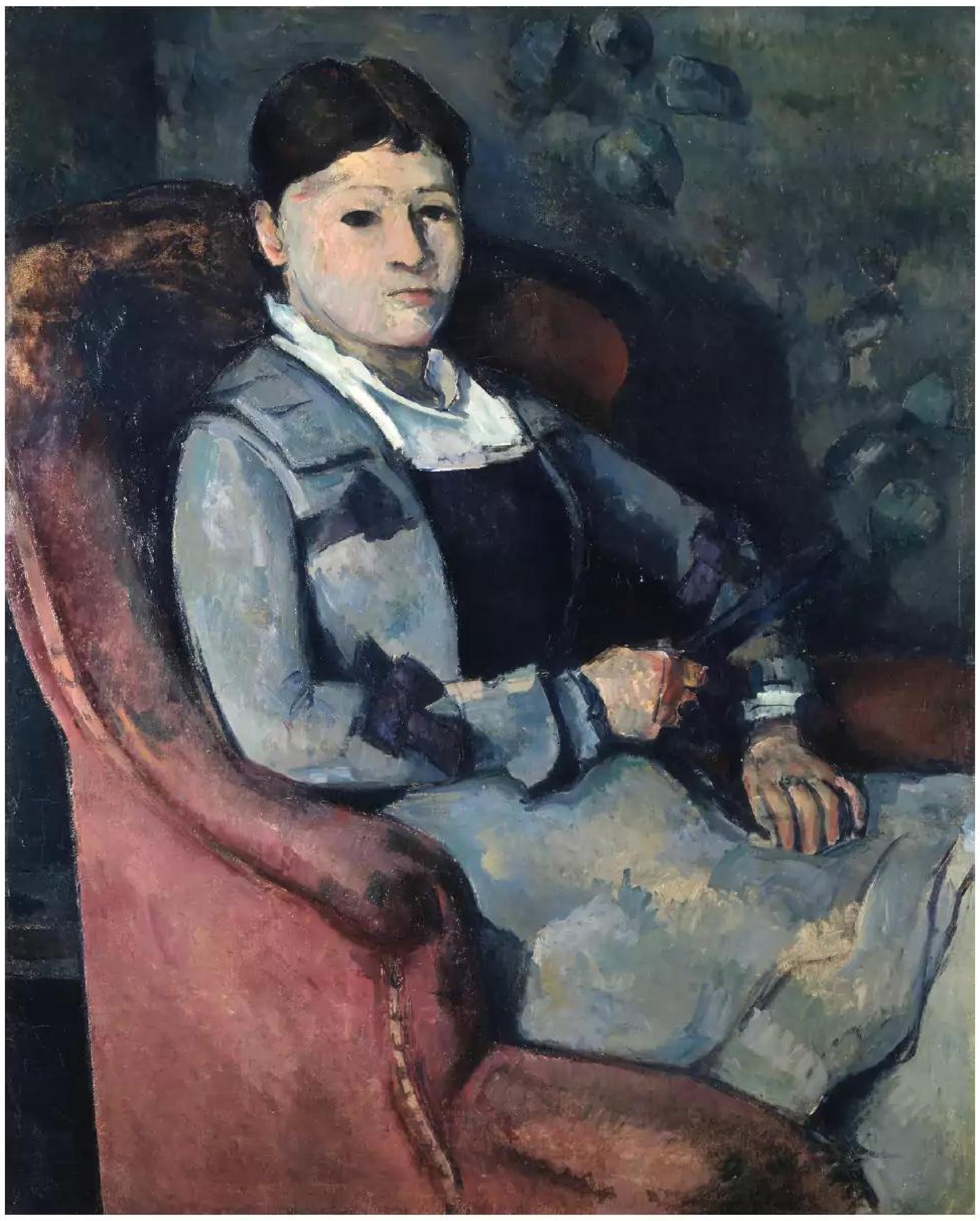
Diary

'Gertrude and Leo's Paris apartment was the first museum of modern art'

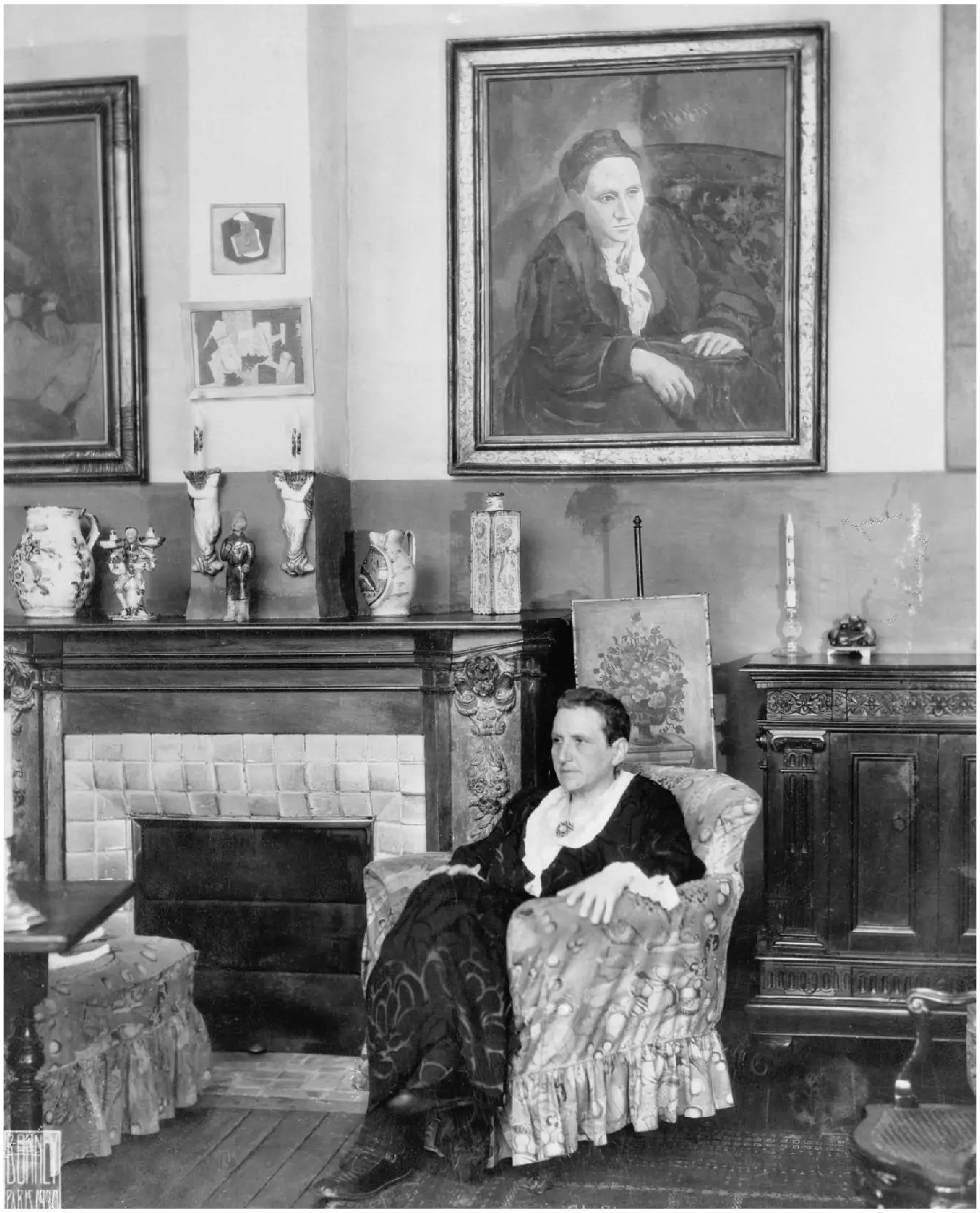
Francesca Wade on the Stein siblings



1. *Madame Cézanne with a Fan*, 1878/88, Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), oil on canvas, 92×73cm. Emil Bührle Collection, on long-term loan at Kunsthaus Zürich

In 1970, the Museum of Modern Art in New York opened a blockbuster exhibition, the preparations for which had involved numerous scholars, several millionaires and some clandestine diplomatic negotiations to secure loans of works held in Russia. Three years earlier, after the death of Alice B. Toklas – partner of the writer, collector and salonnière Gertrude Stein – a group of the museum's trustees had acquired a cache of the masterpieces that had lined the pair's walls for 60 years. To celebrate the purchase, they launched a monumental undertaking: to reunite as many as possible of the works once owned by Gertrude, Leo, Michael and Sarah Stein – one of the most influential collecting families of the 20th century. Curators pored over faded photographs of their Paris apartments, identifying pictures and sleuthing to discover their current whereabouts. Eventually they gathered more than 200 artworks, now spread across the globe: masterpieces by acknowledged 19th-century greats (Manet, Bonnard and Renoir), Surrealist canvases by the cosmopolitan 'Neo-Romantics' (Pavel Tchelitchew, Eugène Berman, Christian Bérard) and Cubist compositions by Pablo Picasso and Jean Gris. Among them was Cézanne's still life of a bowl of apples, which Leo had taken with him when he left the flat he shared with his sister for a new life in Florence. For the first time, it was united with *Pomme (Apple)*, which Picasso had painted to console Gertrude for the absence of her favourite Cézanne. An inscription on the back of this canvas read 'Souvenir pour Gertrude et Alice, Picasso, Noel 1914'.

If only the artworks in the Stein collection could talk. From the walls of 27 rue de Fleurus, they presided over salons where an international array of writers and artists mingled on equal terms and inspired a ferment of creative innovation which resonated down the decades. Gertrude and Leo Stein bought their first paintings from Ambroise Vollard's shop on the rue Laffitte, shortly after they arrived in Paris from America in 1903. Leo was studying painting, Gertrude was determined to write; at first, buying art was a diverting way to decorate their new home and spend the monthly allowance they received from their brother Michael's shrewd investment of funds acquired by selling an idea for a railway franchise to a San Francisco transport mogul. Since works by established masters were out of their price range, they focused on newer names, willing to take risks on art that appeared daring, strange, or even ugly. At the Salon d'Automne of October 1905, they bought Matisse's *Femme au Chapeau*, to the surprise of the artist, who had considered burning the painting for the insurance money after witnessing the crowds jeering and scratching at the unfamiliar daubs of pink, purple, blue and green. Michael and his



2. Gertrude Stein in her apartment in Paris in the 1930s, sitting beneath Picasso's portrait of her. Just visible on the other side of the chimney is the painting *Madame Cézanne with a Fan* (Fig. 1)

wife Sarah became Matisse's primary patrons, but Gertrude's attentions were soon diverted. A few weeks later, she and Leo visited the gallerist – and former clown – Clovis Sagot, who offered them a new work by a young Spanish artist he insisted was 'the real thing'. When Gertrude confessed she didn't like the legs, Sagot offered to guillotine the canvas in half; Leo convinced her to take the full painting, and they bought Picasso's *Girl With a Basket of Flowers* for the equivalent of $30. It last sold, in 2018, for $115 million.

The Steins' Left Bank apartment was, in a sense, the first museum of modern art. Word quickly got out that these eccentric American siblings opened their doors each Saturday night to anyone who wanted to see their collection of works by vanguard contemporary artists making radical experiments with form: many visitors were deeply affected by what they saw. Leo Stein remembered Picasso staring so intently at Cézanne's portrait of his wife (Fig. 1), hung above Gertrude's desk, that he feared the painting would dissolve under the scrutiny: the artist later attributed to Cézanne's example some of the aesthetic breakthroughs that led to the origins of Cubism (Gertrude, too, revealed that Cézanne's approach to space and form had been a formative influence on her writing). Even those who didn't visit the salon in person were affected by its power: the Steins lent paintings to the Armory Show in New York, the first exhibition to introduce modern European art to American audiences; Roger Fry borrowed several works for the Post-Impressionist exhibition he curated at London's Grafton Galleries in 1910, which set Virginia Woolf thinking about new ways of representing people, to prioritise expressiveness of inner realities over achieving a likeness. Gertrude Stein 'used the pictures every minute of the day', as Toklas put it: her physical immersion in cutting-edge art inspired her own extraordinary experiments with language, venturing – in the words of one contemporary critic – to 'do with words what Picasso does with paint'.

Down the years, the Stein collection underwent regular transformations. Paintings Gertrude had fallen out of love with – or whose creators had displeased her – were consigned to a back room they called the 'salon des refusés', while her own portrait by Picasso was always hung most prominently, placed above her chair (Fig. 2). She was not averse to deepening rivalries between artists by repositioning works: Picasso painted *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* in a jealous rage after arriving at the rue de Fleurus to find Matisse installing his latest production, *Bonheur de Vivre*, above the dining table. Leo left the household in 1913, taking with him all the Matisses (Gertrude, who had begun to suspect Matisse's art was decorative rather than revolutionary, kept the Picassos). For the rest of her life, Gertrude traded artworks with friends and dealers whenever she needed money – for food supplies in the two world wars, or to raise funds for the publishing house she and Toklas established, in 1930, exclusively to print her own avant-garde writing. She continued to collect after Leo left, though some murmured that she had lost her touch: time may have vindicated her support of Francis Picabia, but few understood her ardent championing of Francis Rose, an opium-smoking, self-mythologising Scottish baronet whom Toklas commissioned to design Stein's tombstone. (It may be time for a reappraisal: his sketches of Stein and Toklas at home are delightful and many of his Surrealist-inflected paintings are intriguing and accomplished.)

By Gertrude's death in 1946, the collection was diminished; in 1963 the remaining works were sequestered by her heirs, anxious that the elderly, frail Toklas – who was prone to leaving the apartment for months on end to attend arthritis cures in Rome – was not properly safeguarding their inheritance. Now that they're dispersed in air-conditioned museums across the world, it's easy to forget that these paintings spent much of their lives in the intimacy of a home: forming a backdrop to everyday goings-on, soaking up cigarette smoke, accumulating layers of grime dislodged only by the occasional feather duster. (They were reunited again at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2011; the catalogue of that show contains a wealth of fascinating information.) Yet every work once owned by the Steins bears within it the vestiges of its one-time home – and the proud mark of its collectors' taste. 'It was a collection,' wrote Janet Flanner in the *New Yorker*, 'with its own kind of private life.'

Francesca Wade is the author of *Gertrude Stein: An Afterlife*, published by Faber & Faber.

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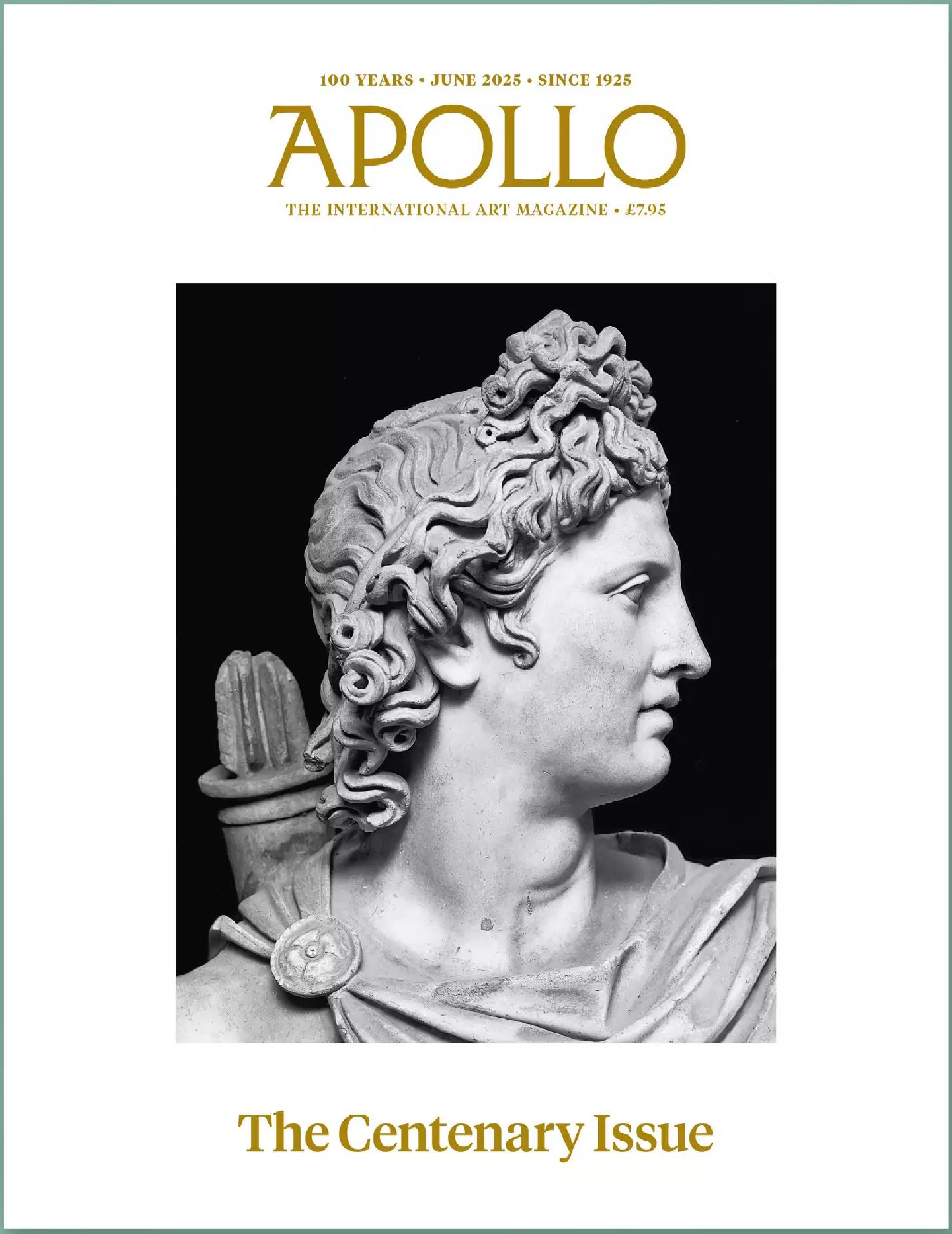

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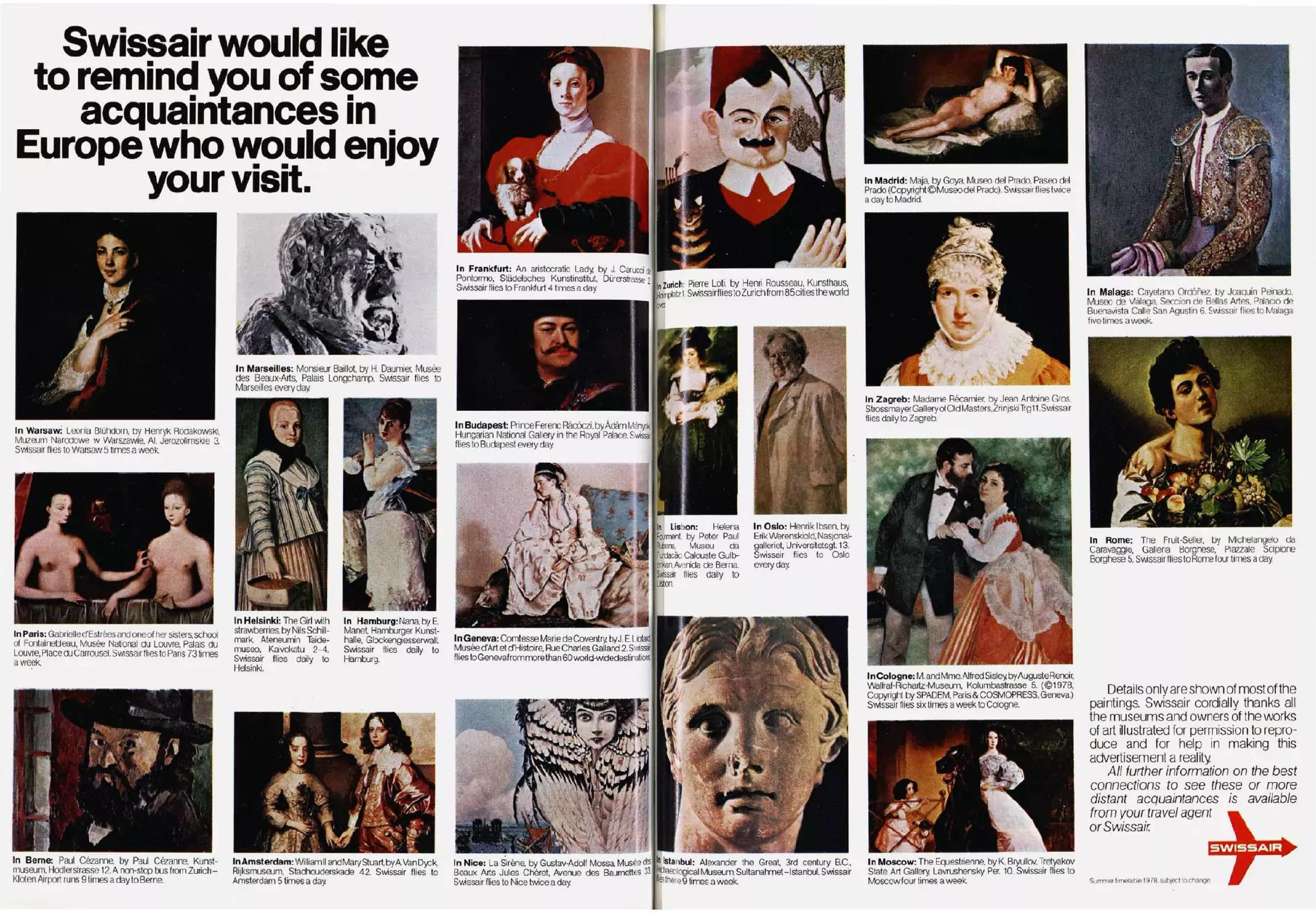
Apollo at 100

Campaign trail

Stephen Patience is tickled by some of *Apollo*'s more eccentric adverts over the decades



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In Berne: Paul Cézanne, by Paul Cézanne, Kunstmuseum, Hodlerstrasse 12. A non-stop bus from Zurich–Kloten Airport runs 9 times a day to Berne.

In Marseilles: Monsieur Baillot, by H. Daumier, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Longchamp. Swissair flies to Marseilles every day.

In Helsinki: The Girl with strawberries, by Nils Schillmark, Ateneumin Taidemuseo, Kaivokatu 2–4. Swissair flies daily to Helsinki.

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In Istanbul: Alexander the Great, 3rd century B.C., Archaeological Museum Sultanahmet – Istanbul. Swissair flies there 9 times a week.

In Madrid: Maja, by Goya, Museo del Prado, Paseo del Prado (Copyright © Museo del Prado). Swissair flies twice a day to Madrid.

In Zagreb: Madame Récamier, by Jean Antoine Gros, Strossmayer Gallery of Old Masters, Zrinjski Trg 11. Swissair flies daily to Zagreb.

In Cologne: M. and Mme. Alfred Sisley, by Auguste Renoir, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Kolumbastrasse 5. (©1978, Copyright by SPADEM, Paris & COSMOPRESS, Geneva.) Swissair flies six times a week to Cologne.

In Moscow: The Equestrienne, by K. Bryullov, Tretyakov State Art Gallery, Lavrushensky Per. 10. Swissair flies to Moscow four times a week.

In Malaga: Cayetano Ordóñez, by Joaquin Peinado, Museo de Málaga, Seccion de Bellas Artes, Palacio de Buenavista Calle San Agustin 6. Swissair flies to Malaga five times a week.

In Rome: The Fruit-Seller, by Michelangelo da Caravaggio, Galleria Borghese, Piazzale Scipione Borghese 5. Swissair flies to Rome four times a day.

Details only are shown of most of the paintings. Swissair cordially thanks all the museums and owners of the works of art illustrated for permission to reproduce and for help in making this advertisement a reality.

All further information on the best connections to see these or more distant acquaintances is available from your travel agent or Swissair.

Summer timetable 1978, subject to change.

1. A Swissair advert in the June 1978 issue of *Apollo*

When perusing the back issues of *Apollo*, what stands out most about the commercial pages in its first few decades was quite how few of them there were. Advertisers – stalwarts such as S.W. Wolsey of Buckingham Gate or J. Leger & Son of Old Bond Street – were exclusively to be found hanging around the inside front and back covers, touting their remarkable collections of 17th-century oak furniture/Old Master paintings (delete as applicable) and suggesting that interested parties would be well advised to visit their showrooms at the earliest opportunity. This was the age of the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs, of Cubists, Vorticists, Expressionists and Dada, although such avant-garde concerns hardly seemed to impinge on the antiquarians whose commercials underwrote the magazine's business model.

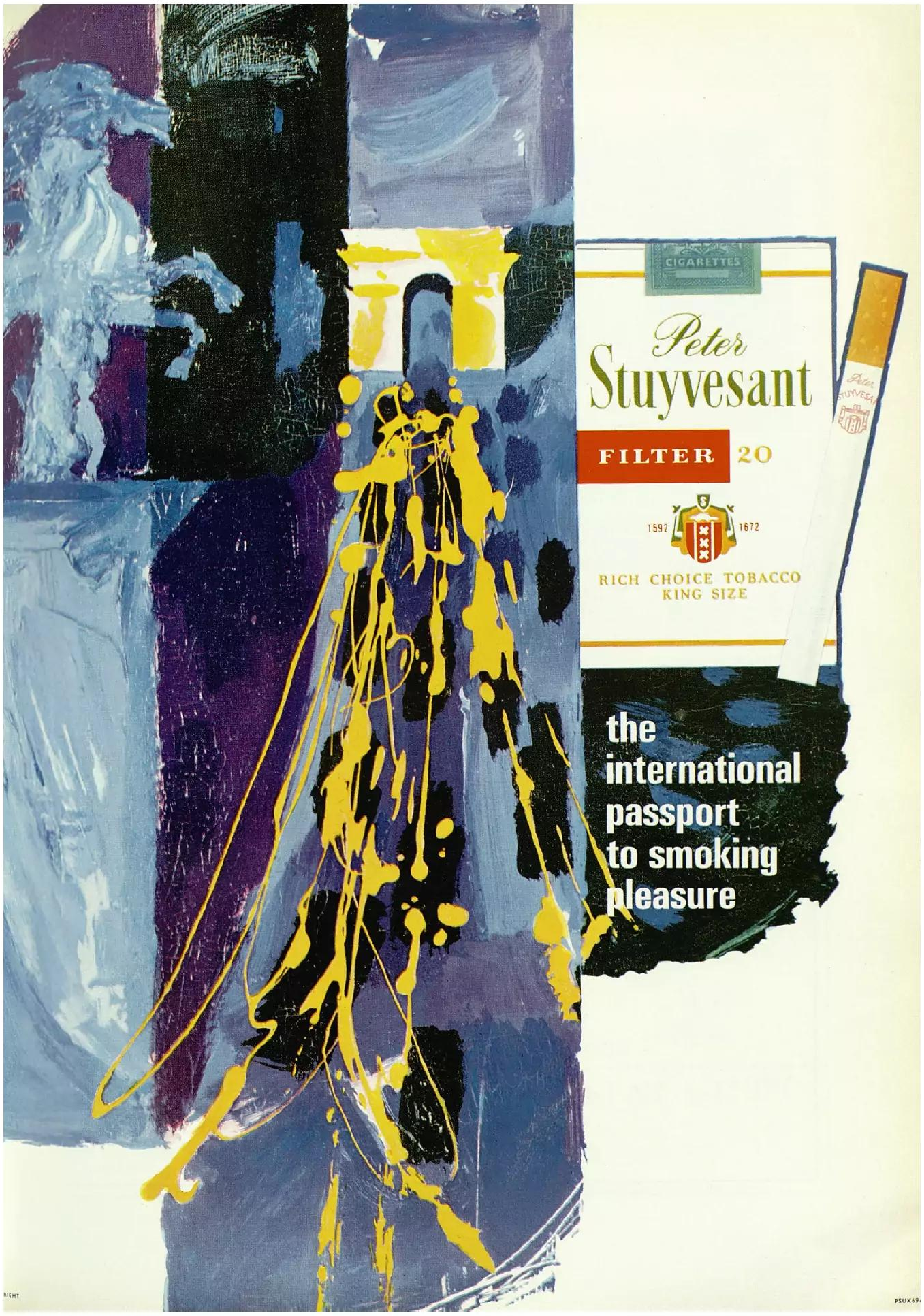
Advertising is, after all, not simply an industry that hinges on the 'big idea'; it's also one that implicitly understands the necessity of targeting specific consumers. But set against this straightforward, even stolid background, the more adventurous spirits stand out all the more. One J.M. Pontremoli, for example, printed an open letter to his clients, outlining his retirement plans and the sale of his inventory of English needlework at huge discounts. 'You will help *me* in the speedy liquidation of my stock and, what is more important, you will obtain rare tapestries and carpets at prices determined only by necessity,' he wrote, with all the florid politesse of an elderly clergyman penning the introduction to a collection of sermons. 'Call in soon, will you? and inspect them.' Reproduced at an oblique angle, the typewritten letter was dated 1 December 1938; it appeared on a monthly basis until September 1939. Pontremoli's retirement was a long time coming.

By the 1940s, the endpage adverts had been supplemented by a cluster of small ads with the proportions of the mottoes found in Christmas crackers. Yet beyond a few oblique assurances ('Buy a clock from Percy Webster… and help to make the wheels go round!'), *Apollo*'s advertisers blithely went about their trade in Jacobean walnut banqueting tables or Tsarist goblets as if nothing much had recently changed. One, the Old House at Seaford, seemed to advocate repeated jaunts to East Sussex: 'One visit is not enough – you will come again.' As the wartime propaganda might have put it, is your journey *really* necessary? It is a sign of the dynamism of the small ads pages that the Old House continued to run its slot almost entirely unchanged until the late 1980s.

In such a context, the advertising revolution of the 1960s becomes all the more noticeable. Under the editorship of Denys Sutton, the adverts increased exponentially, such that by December 1964 the reader was obliged to traverse the foothills of some 138 pages of commerce before arriving at the Kathmandu of the Contents. Noticeably, the trade in Meissen cats, Syro-Hittite bronzes and so forth was now augmented by the likes of Kandinsky, Matisse and Epstein – an indication of a subtle change in focus both in the magazine and the international art market since the 1920s. More telling were ads viewing the past through a psychedelic prism: a campaign for the Victorian Society features an engraving of an elaborate carved chair in a fuchsia tone that evokes Terry Gilliam; a sale of Tiffany glass at Lillian Nassau in New York is heralded by the sort of curvilinear art nouveau script otherwise found on LP sleeve art. By 1973, an art deco lacquer table is hawked by Galerie Maria de Beyrie in Paris with full-on Biba typography – a retro vision quite distinct from the stuff that would have been found in *Apollo*'s pages the first time around.

The mid century also saw multiple incursions from clients bearing the clear influence of Helmut Krone's epochal 'Think Small' and 'Lemon' campaigns for the VW Beetle in 1959, an aesthetic that can be loosely summarised as involving acres of unused white space and a bold, declarative statement followed by a full stop. Often without a verb. One such that leaps out from the pages of *Apollo* depicts a stylised spiral coil, with staccato copy reading: 'Discover the mainsprings. Get drive from the knowledge that is power. Keep this power at its peak. Rewind at regular intervals. Oil the wheels from time to time.' An advert for Rolex? Or Patek Philippe, perhaps? No, it's the *Financial Times* from 1962, a publication that stands out among the magazine's regular advertisers for its inventive campaigns. By 1978 it was running a collaged reworking of Frans Hals, a cavalier pieced together from folded and fan-pleated newsprint.

Other campaigns, too, seem tailored to tap into the artistic temperaments of *Apollo* readers. Swissair endeavoured 'to remind you of some acquaintances in Europe who would enjoy your visit' – a series of faces cropped from works by Cézanne, Gros, Caravaggio et al. in various galleries from Málaga to Moscow (Fig. 1). Similarly jet-setting, Peter Stuyvesant cigarettes ('The International Passport to Smoking Pleasure') ran with a rather garish full-page painting in purple and sky-blue, an abstracted view of what is presumably the Champs-Elysées – the lights of the main drag are rendered in yellow splotches of oil paint, after Jackson Pollock (Fig. 2).



2. An advert for Peter Stuyvesant cigarettes in the December 1964 issue of *Apollo*

Even advances in technology led to ads being laser-targeted, the antique colliding with the modern. 'We don't want our computer to end up as an antique. So please help us keep it up to date!' wrote Michael Davis (Shipping) Ltd in the late 1970s, accompanied by an endearing sketch of a Chippendale-style cabinet housing a state-of-the-art reel-to-reel mainframe. By 1998, the online Network Gallery was trumpeting its modernity with a yellow @ symbol – that curlicued icon that embodied the '90s internet – set within a rococo silver frame. Nevertheless, it felt obliged to include telephone and fax numbers. Just in case.

The web has, of course, had a profound effect on the magazine industry and its advertising model; it feels, too, like the natural abode of some of the more, shall we say, esoteric enterprises found in *Apollo*'s back issues. Take this advertisement from D.M. Klinger of Nürnberg, W. Germany, in 1984: 'We prepare special auctions of erotic art in Africa, the primitives and South America, erotic watches and automatons, erotic cards and games, erotic postcards, erotic walking sticks' – you get the point. We will not see its like again.

Stephen Patience is a freelance writer.

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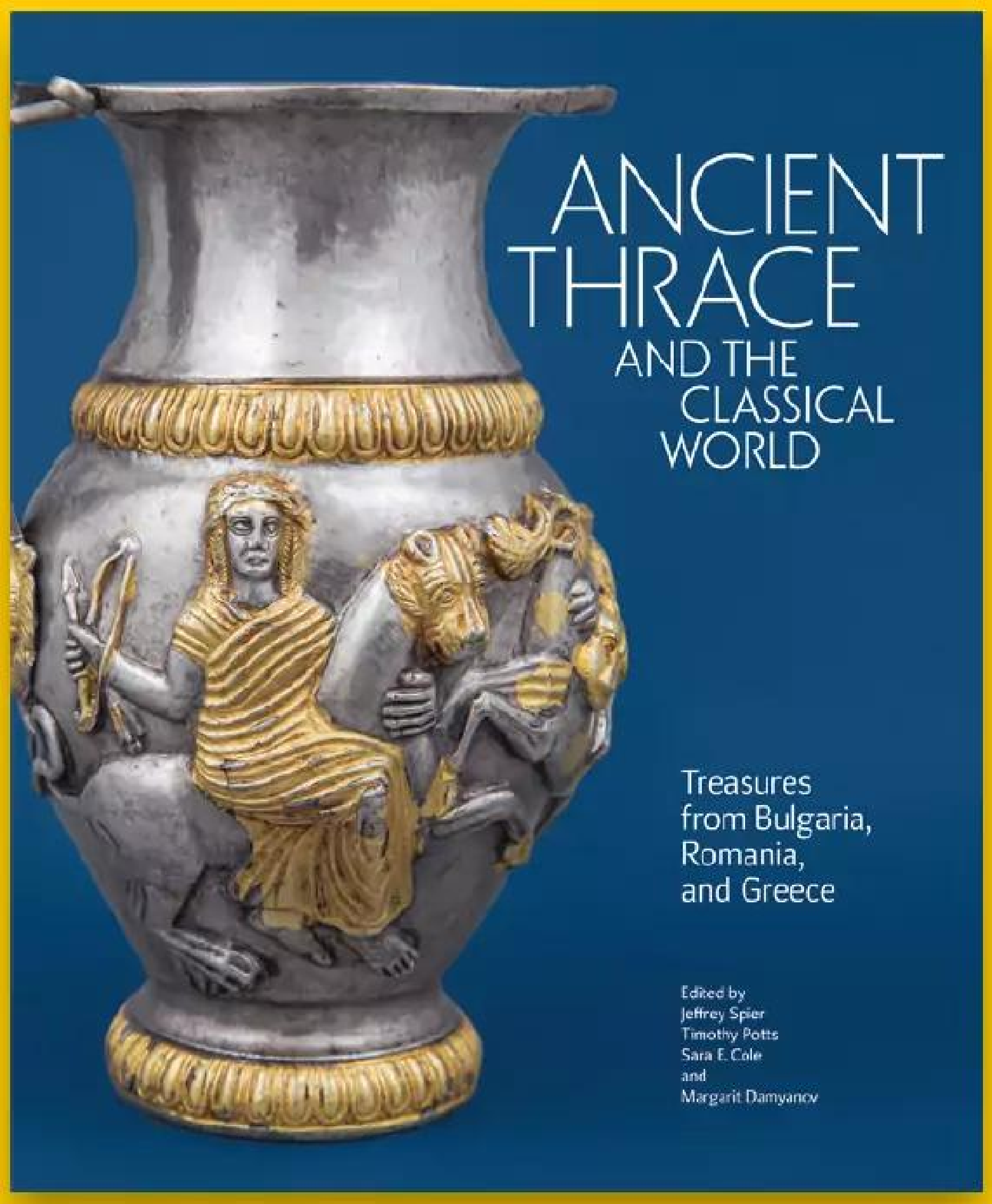
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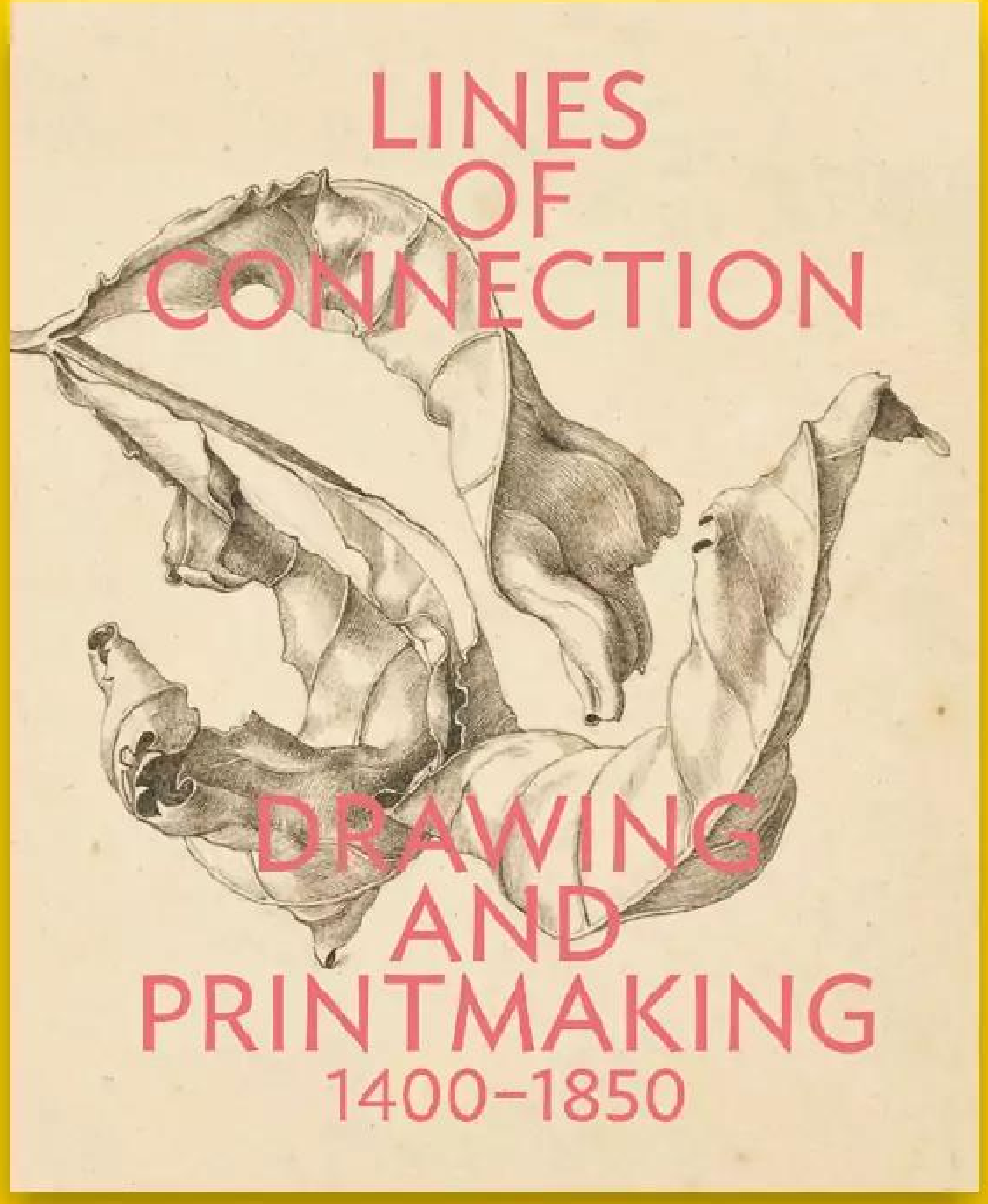
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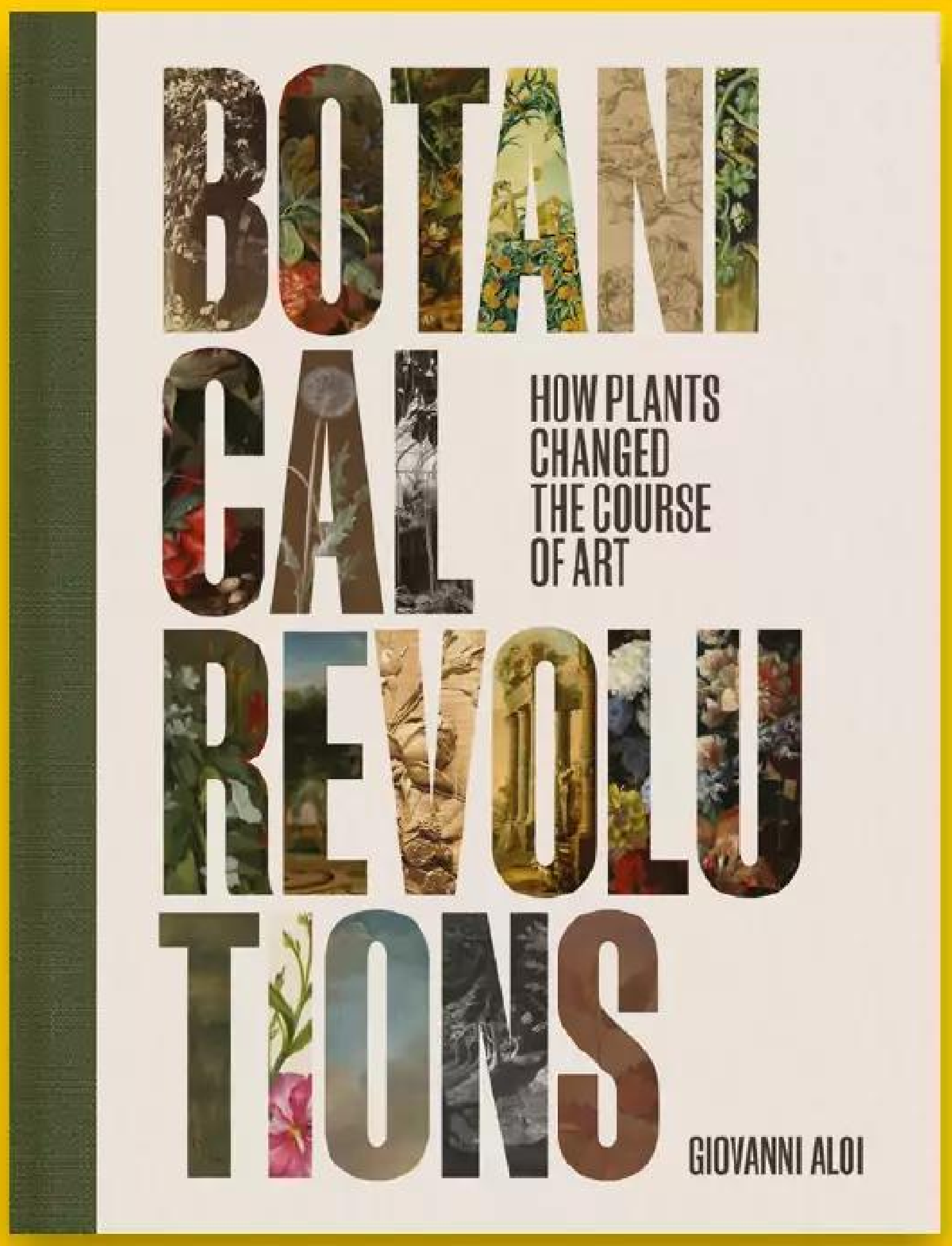
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HOW PLANTS CHANGED THE COURSE OF ART
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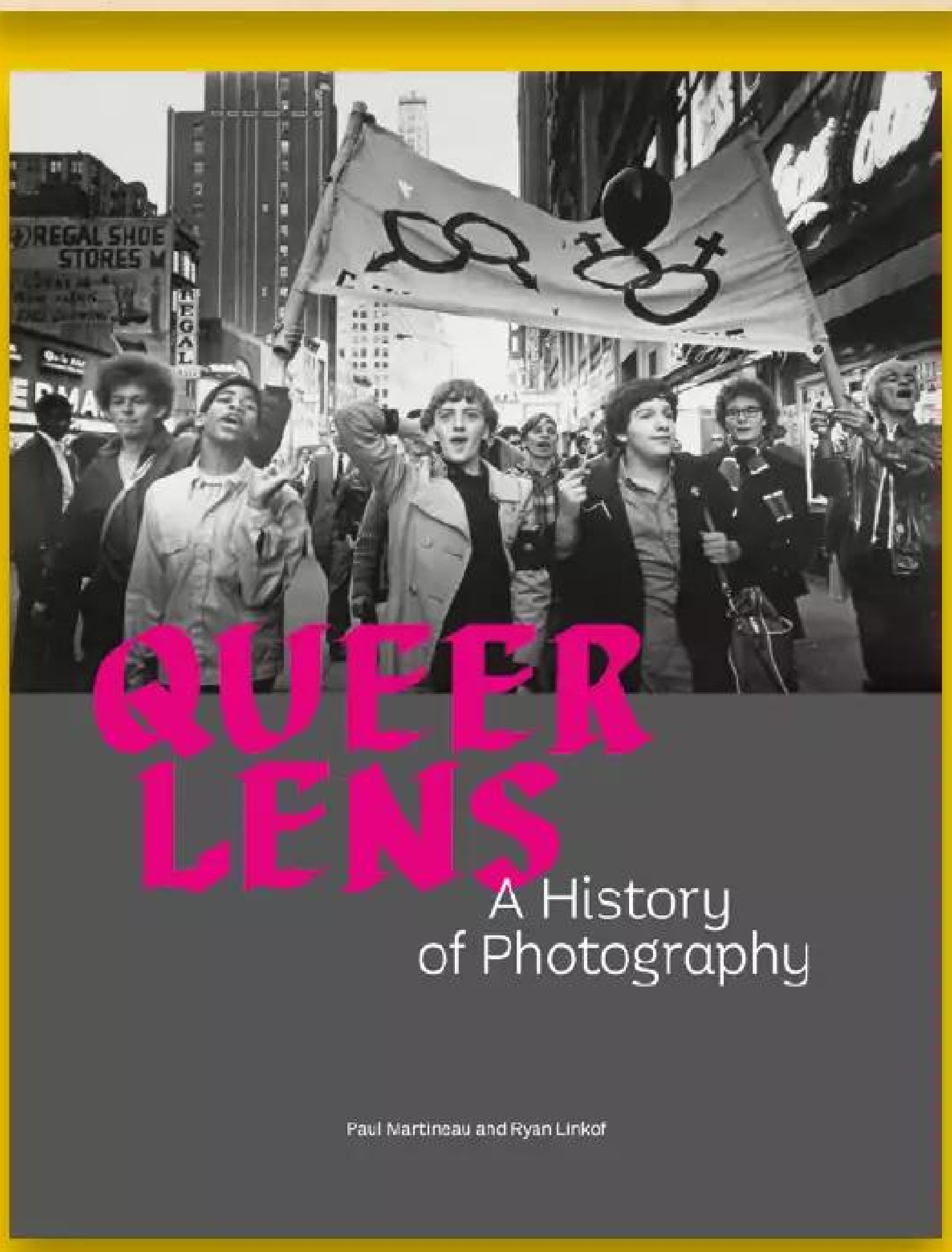
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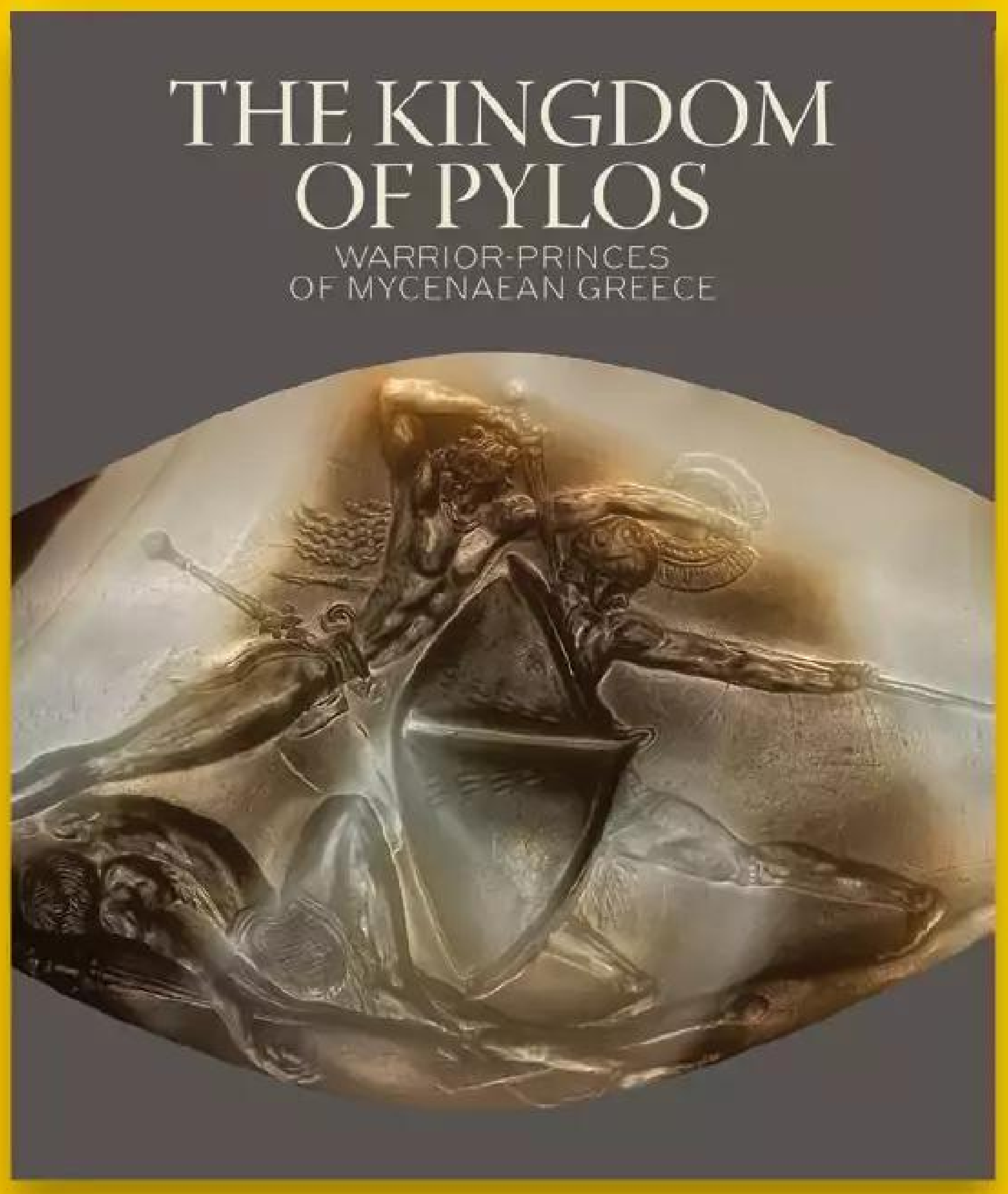
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Apollo at 100

Keeping up appearances

Thomas Marks on the magazine's history of pop culture cameos

There is an evocative photograph, taken during an early Rolling Stones tour in Ireland, of the late Charlie Watts reading in a train carriage. Outside the window, in the rain, three young women gaze keenly at the rock star at rest. Watts is oblivious to them. His attention is fixed on the latest issue of *Apollo*: September 1965, 'Treasures from the Metropolitan Museum of Art'.

One of the pleasures of editing this magazine, as I did from 2013–21, is to notice the little ripples it has made, during a century of continuous publication, in the culture beyond its pages. That includes chancing on illustrious if unexpected readers such as Watts – or the food writer Elizabeth David, who used back issues of *Apollo* in the 1980s to research the illustrations for new editions of the cookery books that three decades earlier had made her name.

APOLLO
NARD

1. Alexander Knox's character in *Accident* (1967), with a little light reading

Courtesy STUDIOCANAL

Apollo was perhaps most visible during the quarter-century regime (1962–87) of the art historian Denys Sutton, an editor so sure of his billing that he installed the motto 'Edited by Denys Sutton' on the magazine's cover. Sutton was a prolific writer and curator, contributing long articles to most of the issues he oversaw while also making time during his tenure to knock out books on Whistler and Sickert and organise exhibitions on Bonnard and others.

In accounts of the period, alas, Sutton is remembered chiefly for his intemperateness. 'Of course Sutton is a beast,' wrote the diarist James Lees-Milne in 1978 after the editor had sacked Lees-Milne's nephew from a job at *Apollo*. 'Sutton could be a tyrant,' Vanessa Nicolson recalls in her memoir, *Have You Been Good?* (2015). Her own departure from a role at the magazine, she recounts, was precipitated by the editor's rage on receipt of a letter from the Queen of Denmark, pointing out a mix-up with the image captions in an article about Danish castles.

When Sutton took on *Apollo*, John D. Wright has written, 'the magazine [...] was thin and dullish, but Sutton immediately expanded it, made it more attractive and widened its scope'. If not a household name, *Apollo* in the 1960s certainly became familiar to a wider culturally literate audience than it had previously mustered. In Barrie Sturt-Penrose's *The Art Scene* (1969), a mischievous popular survey of the 'international art world', the frontispiece shows the author kitted out as a tramp, asleep on a bench alongside assorted back issues of *Arts Review*, *The Connoisseur* and *Apollo*.

In 1967, two years after Charlie Watts had rejected the charms of Venus for those of *Apollo*, the magazine appeared prominently on screen in Joseph Losey's *Accident*, an unsettling psychological thriller about dons and their lawless libidos (Fig. 1). In one scene the fellows of an Oxford college sit in the senior common room as one reads aloud an article about the sex lives of undergraduates in Milwaukee. The provost, played by Alexander Knox, lowers his copy of *Apollo* on learning that 0.1 per cent of students have engaged in sexual activity during a lecture on Aristotle: 'I am surprised to hear that Aristotle is on the syllabus in the state of Wisconsin,' he says.

Elsewhere in film and fiction, *Apollo* has sometimes appeared as a means to emphasise the aesthetic or social aspirations of characters. Orvil Pym, the protagonist of Denton Welch's delicate coming-of-age novel, *In Youth is Pleasure* (1945), squeezes the magazine for inspiration in imagining a fantastical studiolo encrusted with precious stones and works of art: 'Orvil had learnt many interesting facts from the pages of the magazine *Apollo*, which he saw regularly at school', Welch writes, 'so he was able, from his memory of these, to furnish the most intricate details for his fantastically rich dream closet.' William Beckwith, the idle, hedonistic narrator of Alan Hollinghurst's first novel, *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988), cannot bring himself to buy *War Picture Library* comics for a lover, Arthur, because – as a friend observes – 'it would sort ill with *Apollo*, *Tatler* and *GQ*' at the local newsagents.

There are further examples: *Apollo* as a period detail in *Man in an Orange Shirt* (2017), a BBC adaptation of a novel by Patrick Gale charting the lives of two gay couples, following the Second World War and in the present day respectively; or the magazine's frequent cameos in the comedy drama *Lovejoy* (1986–94), usually on the desk or in the studio of one art-world swindler or another. And then there are the near misses. There's no reference to *Apollo* in Patricia Highsmith's Ripley novels, for instance, even when their anti-hero is enthusiastically feeding forged paintings to the London art market. But surely Tom Ripley, that most connoisseurial of conmen, is an *Apollo* reader – right?

Thomas Marks was editor of *Apollo* from 2013–21.

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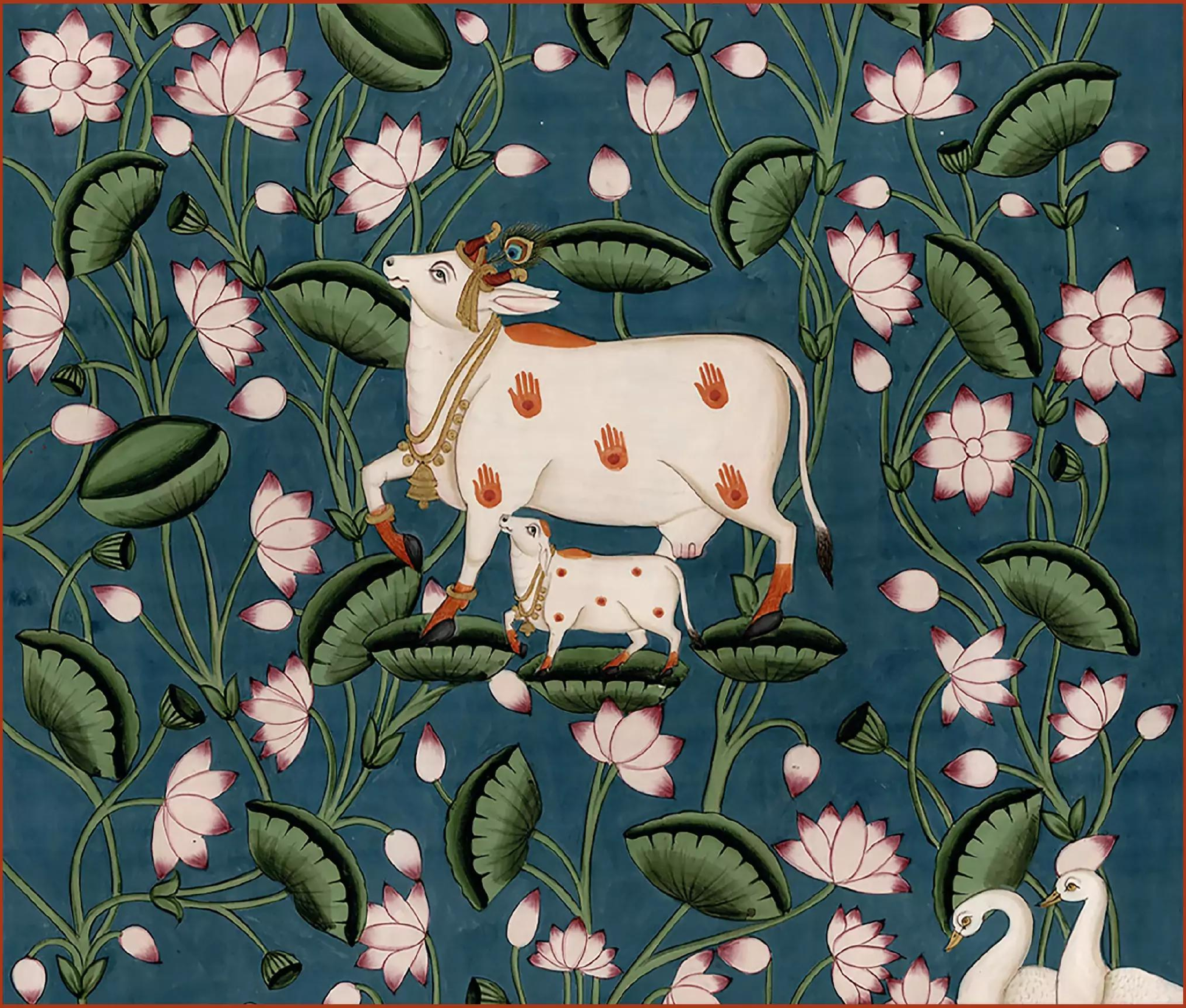

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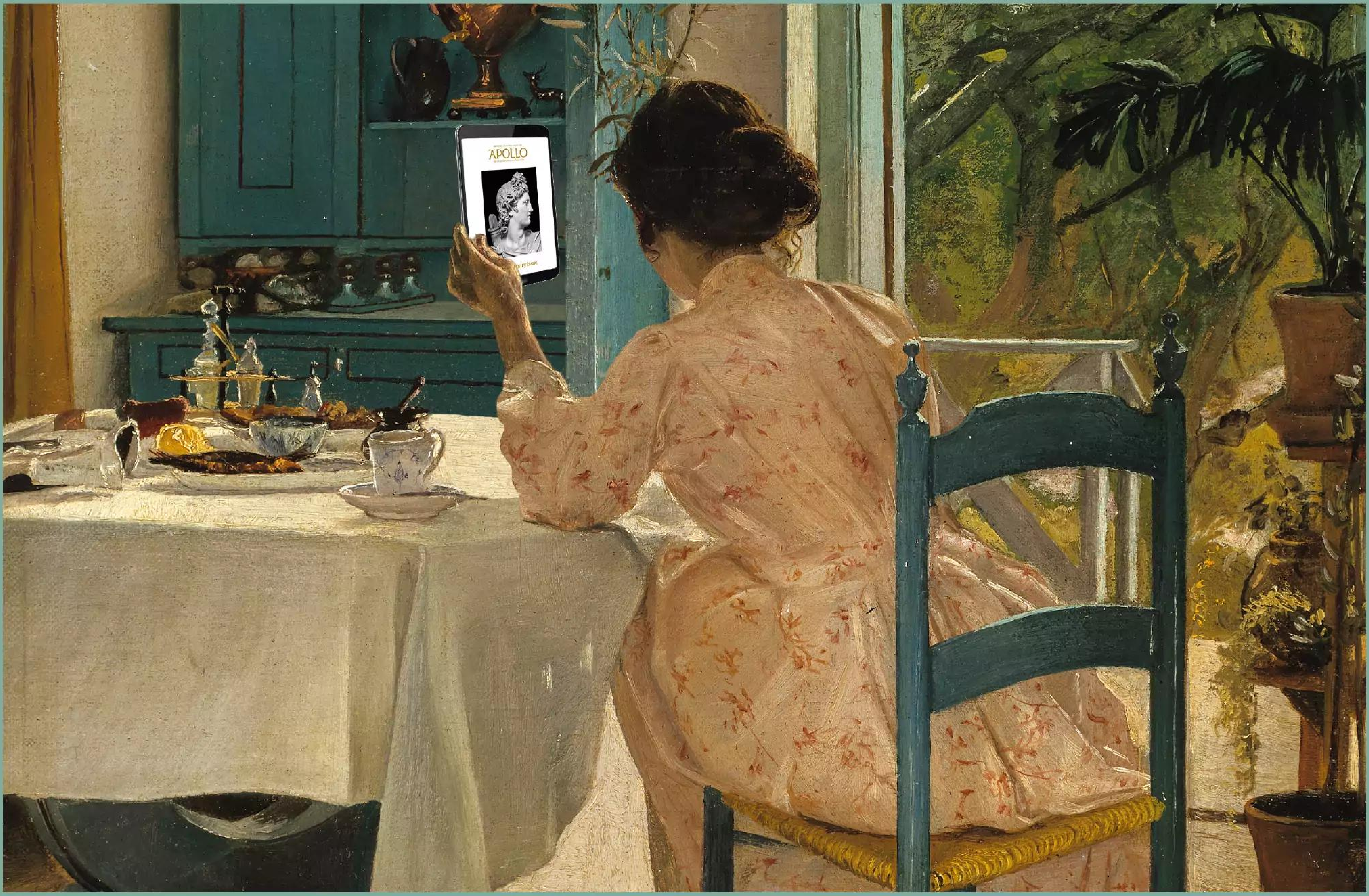

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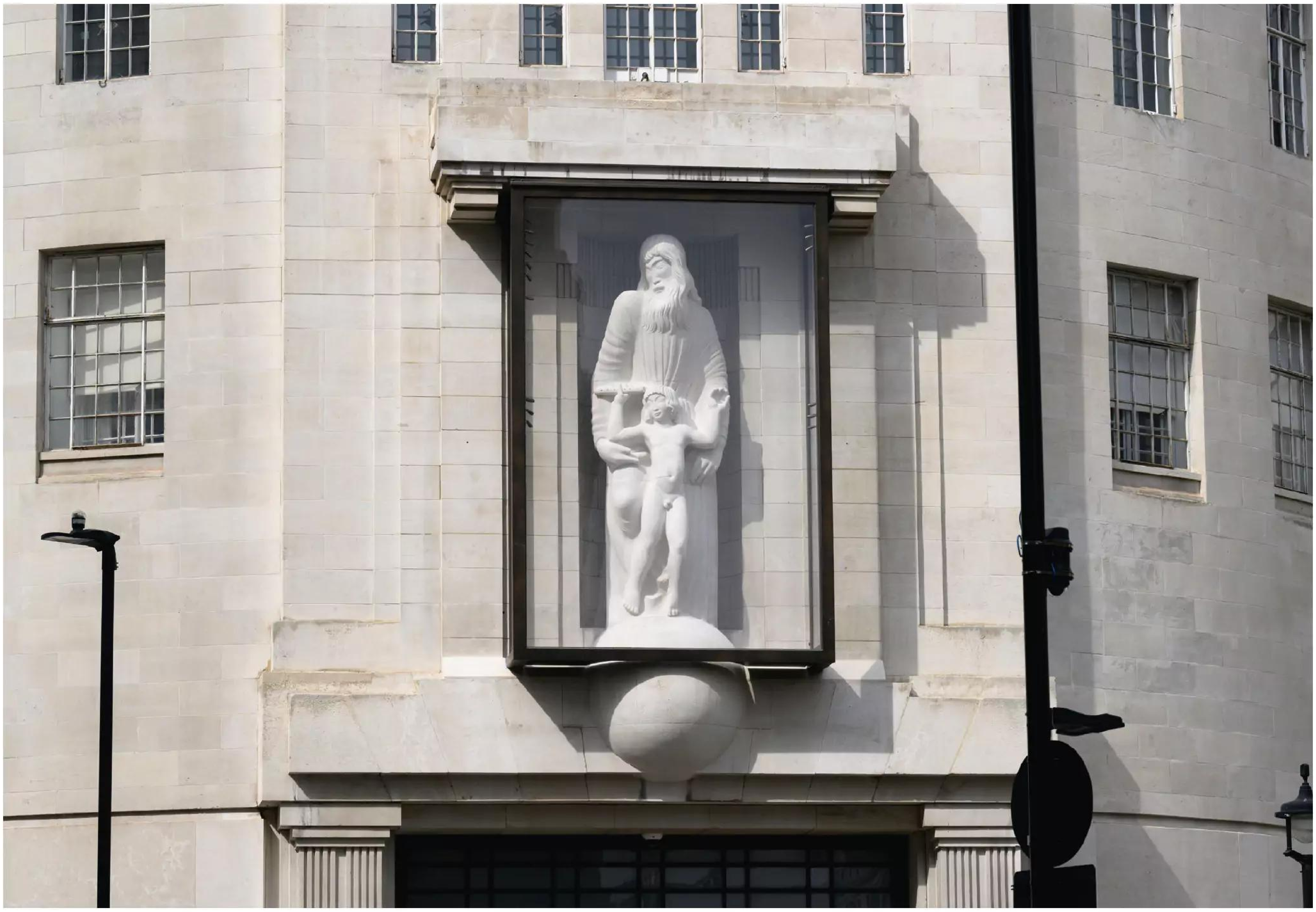
In plain sight

The BBC has chosen to deal with its Eric Gill problem by means of that most ubiquitous of modern accessories: a QR code. But do they hide more than they reveal?

By Will Wiles



1. Eric Gill's *Prospero & Ariel* (1932), now behind glass at Broadcasting House in London

Photo: Alex MacNaughton/Alamy Stock Photo

How do you solve a problem like Eric Gill? For the BBC, a QR code is part of the answer. Eric Gill's statue, *Prospero & Ariel* (Fig. 1), mounted on the prow of Broadcasting House in central London, was attacked with hammer and chisel in 2022 and 2023. A man arrested after the second attack is awaiting trial. *Prospero & Ariel*, made in 1932, has become an embarrassing figurehead for the BBC because of Gill's abuse of his daughters, incestuous affairs, and sexual experiments with a dog, all of which were revealed in the late 1980s, long after the artist's death. There have been calls for the removal of his work from Broadcasting House and elsewhere ever since.

So, what can the BBC do? There's a broad consensus that *Prospero & Ariel* should not be removed; it is a significant work in its own right and an integral part of a landmark building. The restored statue, which was unveiled in April this year, has been enclosed in a glass case, not unlike those Perspex boxes some inner-city supermarkets put around joints of meat to prevent shoplifting. This permanent architectural intervention is accompanied by an ugly fortification of temporary planters and galvanised fences on the pavement, which rather undercuts claims about preserving the appearance of the building. But that's not all. There's also 'a QR code which links to information about the history of the building, Eric Gill and the sculpture's restoration', according to BBC News's own report on the subject.

What exactly this QR code is meant to achieve is a little unclear, and the questions

HIGHLIGHT TOUR
SMARTIFY
Ennui

2. A QR code produced by Smartify for the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, directing visitors to *Ennui* (1917–18) by Walter Sickert

only multiply when you find it, mounted in a window on the ground floor of the building. (There are in fact two, but they link to the same place.) 'Explore the history of Broadcasting House here,' says the sign, rather than anything specifically about Gill, and that's what the link provides, with the following detail embedded in the sixth paragraph:

> Revelations about Gill's private life in a 1980s biography created a backlash against him; and while the BBC in no way condones his abusive behaviour, it draws a line between his life and his artistic creations.

This is reticent and lawyerly – a fair summary of a reasonable stance. But what on earth is the QR code for? Who is it for? A casual passer-by may be interested to learn more about Colonel Val Myer's art deco hulk. But the code is clearly intended as a load-bearing part of the BBC's mitigation of discomfort around the retention of *Prospero & Ariel* – the corporation says as much in its news story, which highlights the code as if it is significant in itself. Why? It cannot be intended to deter further attacks to the statue. It's simply impossible to imagine a sequence of events in which a vandal is turned around by this sign. The sign instead seems to be a way to forestall any further criticism.

The gesture smacks of bureaucratic obfuscation, sliding between concealment and openness. It promises more information, but only if you are motivated enough to stop, take out your phone, and use the code to connect to the linked website. In the event of any further complaints, the BBC can point to the QR code as its acknowledgement of the issue, while keeping any real acknowledgement safely out of sight. It is a kind of fig leaf for the BBC's institutional embarrassment over Gill – one that highlights the rise of the QR code, and its curiously ambiguous meanings.

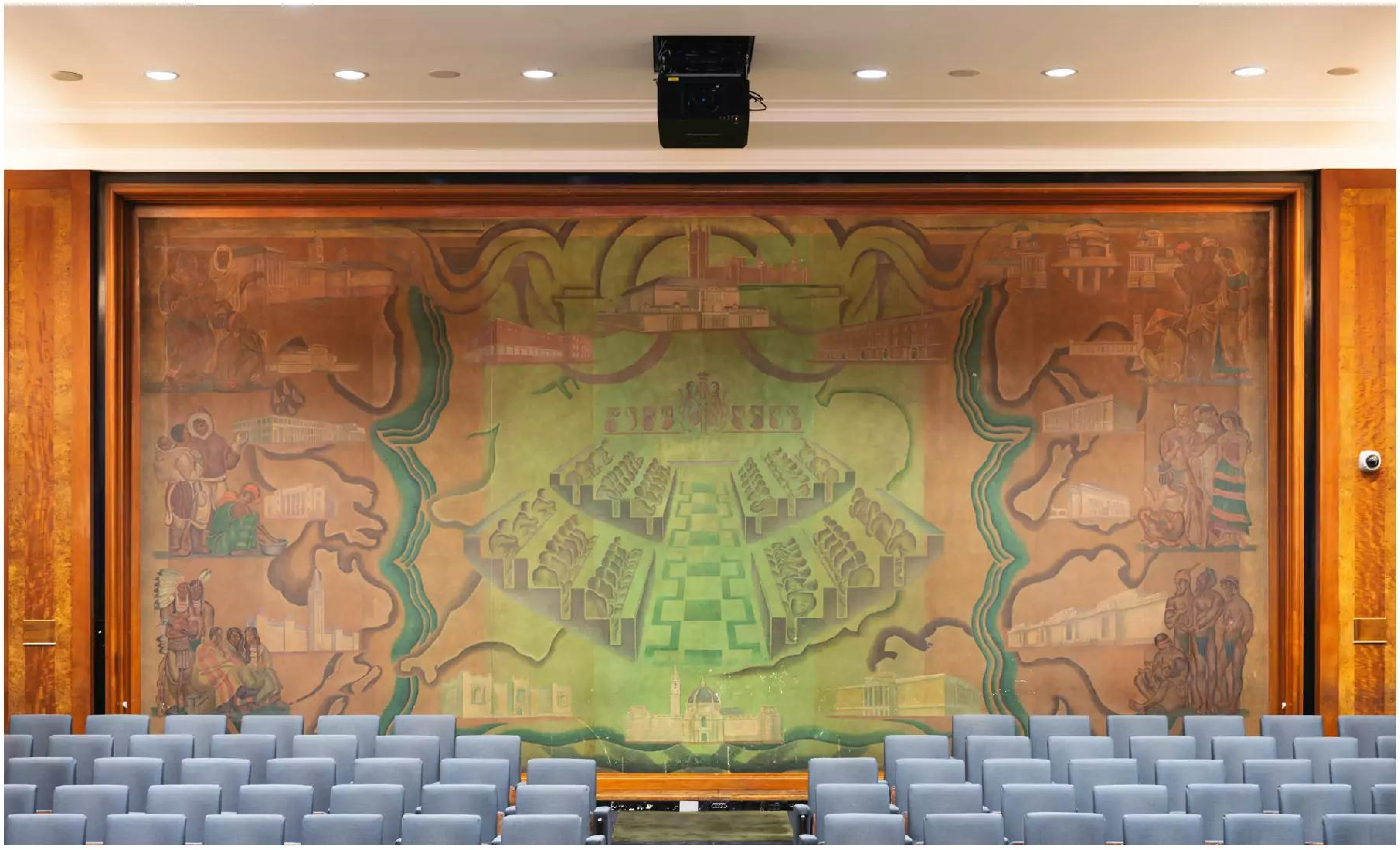
In the past decade, the QR code has become widespread enough to dissolve into invisibility. This has been especially true in galleries and museums, where QR codes are increasingly used to connect visitors with resources such as audio guides, or for enhanced experiences. Smartify, a company that develops these experiences, has more than 700 partners, including the National Gallery and many other major institutions (Fig. 2). But the code had much more utilitarian origins. Developed in 1994 by an engineer called Masahiro Hara at an automotive parts company in Kariya, Japan, the QR code was initially used for stock control and logistics. 'QR' stands for 'quick response'. Numeric barcodes were becoming cumbersome and Hara was tasked with finding a way of more densely encoding information for more rapid retrieval; the chequerboard QR code was his solution, inspired by the arrangement of pieces on a Go board.

The codes can be a variety of sizes, depending on the amount of information that must be encoded. The largest QR code can carry more than 4,000 alphanumeric characters, a little less than half the length of this article. But their real genius is the maths underlying their encryption, a technique called Reed-Solomon error correction, which means that information can be successfully retrieved from an incomplete or partially obscured code, making them a lot more flexible and resilient than suggested by their visual complexity.

The QR code broke free of the warehouse and the assembly line in the 2000s, thanks to the rise of internet-connected smartphones with cameras. Back then they were riding on a wave of early excitement about 'augmented reality', when it seemed that a rich digital layer might soon accompany our every step. While a few of those promises have come to pass, nowadays the QR code is mostly used as a handy way to communicate a web address to a user's phone without laboriously copying it out. But, just as was feared almost 20 years ago, this means that an increasing amount of the informational surface area of our world is readable only by machine. Which leaves the question of what the QR code means to us without the involvement of machines – what we think, or don't think, when we see one of those inscrutable little tablecloths.

To understand what's meant by this, let's consider the QR code's ancestor, the barcode. Barcodes, which were first implemented in 1974, use a series of thick and thin lines to represent numbers and are read by a reflecting laser. It's not a complicated technology – indeed,

Photo: © Will Wiles



3. The decorative screen designed in 1934 by Edward Bainbridge Copnall (1903–73) at the Royal Institute of British Architects in London

Photo: Christopher Hope-Fitch/RIBA Collections

unlike QR codes, the most commonly occurring barcodes can be read by the human eye, as easily as understanding Morse code. This is, however, a fairly useless party trick. Although barcodes are used in scores of applications, the place they are most familiar is in retail, where they bring up the prices of products.

Thus, everything for sale in a shop with electronic stock-keeping is marked with a barcode. The barcode has in turn picked up symbolic meaning: this item is for sale. In satire and illustration, a barcode means something commodified, packaged and on the market. Applying a barcode to a human being is therefore an affront to human dignity, a sign that human life has been cheapened and individuality lost, such as in Mike Judge's film *Idiocracy* (2006). QR codes, which are mostly used to convey web addresses, do not have that connotation. But whereas the barcode has information only for machines, the QR code promises something for us humans: whatever lies at that web address.

As a human symbol, then, the QR code functions as a kind of ellipsis, a veil, with the promise of more beyond. They are both enticement and obstacle. This is mirrored in the debates over accessibility that surround them in gallery and museum settings: whether they make information easier to access or more difficult for anyone who doesn't have the relevant technology, or who would prefer not to use it.

The pandemic led to a surge in the use of QR codes, as businesses sought contactless transactions; it became, for instance, everyone's least favourite part of going to a restaurant. Popular or not, this brute-forcing of QR interactions means people are more accustomed to the codes, which in turn have driven their spread. Posh estate agents hide the prices of their properties behind them; in my east London neighbourhood, trees have them, asking passers-by to become 'watering champions'. But might this be the final supernova flare of the technology before it disappears? When I was writing about augmented reality for a design magazine in 2009, QR codes were already being described by experts as an 'absolutely stone-age' way of interacting with digital content. In the near future, it was assumed, information could be accessed through image-recognition and location software. Now that phone cameras can recognise text, copy it, and know when they're looking at a URL, do we still need QR codes? The QR code was a way of making the world more machine-readable; now that the machines are pretty good at reading the world as we see it, might it be on the way out?

Unless, of course, your intention is to hide rather than to reveal. A few blocks away from the BBC, at the headquarters of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), there is another example of contextual labelling to mitigate institutional embarrassment, but handled rather differently. Edward Bainbridge Copnall's decorative screen in the Henry Jarvis Memorial Hall was completed in 1934 (Fig. 3), just two years after *Prospero & Ariel*. Today, its depictions of Indigenous peoples as primitive make it an uncomfortable sight, and RIBA has come under pressure to remove it. While its future is still being decided, an explanatory label beside the mural acknowledges its offensive aspects while neither condoning nor condemning. Of course, there's a QR code, but only as an addendum. All the salient information is on the label. While that will not satisfy everyone, it at least recognises the existence of the issue, which the BBC appears at pains to avoid.

There's one last problem with the QR codes at Broadcasting House. Raising my phone to take a picture of the label, and interact with the code, I was challenged by a security guard. Was I taking a photograph through the window, of the people working in the building? No, I said, I'm trying to use this QR code. There have been complaints, the guard said apologetically. If you don't want people pointing their phones at the windows, I said, then really the sign should be mounted on the wall. He shrugged in agreement. I wondered how often he had had the exact same interaction. In navigating one potential hazard to its employees, the BBC appears to have created another; it may seem obvious but institutions should remember that putting up a QR code tells people: 'Point your phone here'. Ⓐ

Will Wiles is the author, most recently, of *The Anechoic Chamber and Other Weird Tales* (Salt).

Apollo at 100

Adam family values

Sophie Barling on *Apollo*'s first home, Robert Adam's costly Roman palace on the Thames

This magazine's first home, as the cover of its maiden issue in 1925 announces, was 6 Robert Street, Adelphi. For a new journal taking the classical god of the arts as its namesake, this could hardly have been a more suitable address. The Adelphi was an area of London between the Strand and the River Thames that had been developed between 1768 and 1774 by the most fashionable neoclassical architect of the day, Robert Adam – or 'Bob the Roman', as he called himself. And while the ambitious Scot had already applied much of what he had absorbed on his Grand Tour to some of Britain's great houses – at Kedleston, Syon, Osterley, an Englishman's home was now his Roman palace – nowhere, arguably, did he evoke a particular classical structure more entirely than at the Adelphi.

Adam had travelled to Italy in 1755, spending the best part of two years in a landscape rich in ancient ornament but crowded with competitors. Perhaps it was his particular admiration for the Baths of Diocletian in Rome that provided some of the motivation to seek out Spalatro, modern-day Split in Croatia, where that emperor had retired in 305 AD 'to plant cabbages'. The Dalmatian coast was beyond the usual Grand Tour itinerary, and the ruins of the waterfront palace that Diocletian had built there had never been surveyed.

In 1757 Adam returned home with a precious trunkful of drawings from Italy and his 'jaunt to Dalmatia' – where he and his fellow draughtsman Charles-Louis Clérisseau had been asked to leave by the Venetian authorities, who in the climate of the Seven Years' War took their surveying activities for espionage. Adam had gathered enough material, however – including a new 'Spalatro' order – to inaugurate in Britain a style, as he put it, 'directed but not cramped by antiquity'.

A decade later, Adam's career, boosted by grand commissions from the British aristocracy, was at its zenith. He had published his impressive monograph on the ruins of Spalatro in 1764. Despite his achievements, however, state commissions were not forthcoming, and he was excluded from membership of the newly established Royal Academy of Arts (William Chambers, the king's favoured architect, may have had something to do with it). In 1768 Adam's typically bold response was to lay the foundations, literally, for his own speculative housing scheme, to be built with his three brothers. Its name, Adelphi (ancient Greek for 'brothers'), and those of its streets – Robert, John, Adam – would leave no one in doubt of its origins. The site the enterprising siblings had identified was a dilapidated area sloping down to the Thames known as Durham Yard – in previous centuries occupied by a splendid house belonging to the Bishop of Durham, but now regularly flooded by the sewage-infused tidal river. On this 14,000 sqm plot Adam planned five streets of elegant housing, including a monumental principal block running along the river. This 'Royal Terrace' (later known as Adelphi Terrace) would be built up on a podium of arched vaults – a necessary practical measure to correct the site's steep incline and secure the buildings from flooding; but also making the visual echoes of Diocletian's palatial waterfront structure, with its cryptoporticus, hard to ignore.

Through a combination of bad luck and arrogance, the Adams quickly ran into financial difficulty. While cost-cutting attempts were rumoured to include drafting in cheaper workers from Scotland – their labour accompanied by bagpipes to boost morale – what saved the project (if not, ultimately, the Adams' solvency) was the organising in 1773 of a public lottery. Properties still unsold in the Adelphi were among the main prizes, for which 4,370 tickets were issued at £50 each.

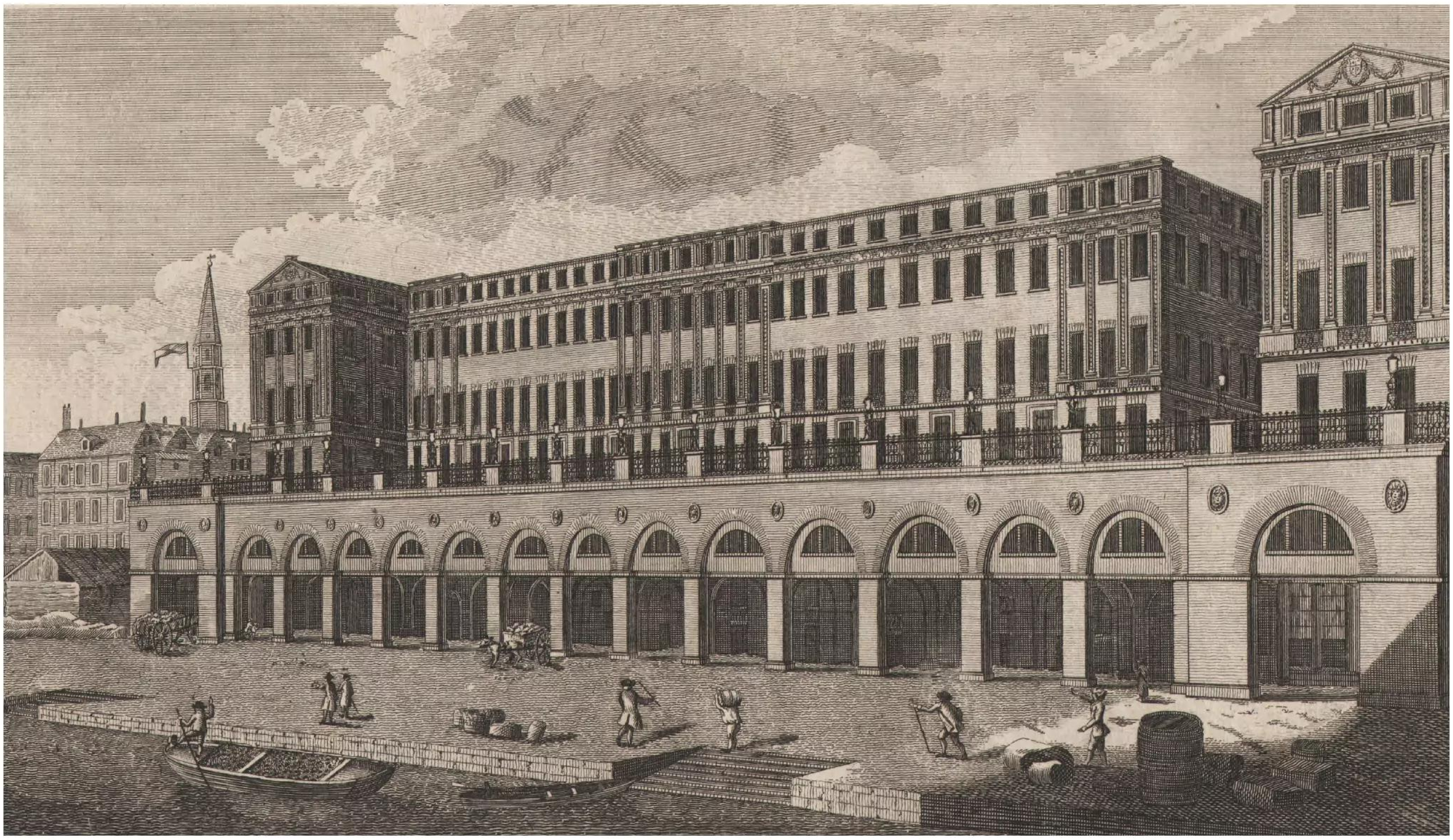
Already enjoying their occupancy at Number 5 Royal Terrace, one of the first houses to be completed, were David Garrick and his wife. The actor and impresario was a friend of Adam's, and had moved in in March 1772 when much of the development was still a building site. The spectacular ceiling Adam designed for his drawing room – all birthday-cake colours and plaster festoons (or 'Gingerbread and snippets of embroidery', as Horace Walpole sniped) – is now in the V&A. At its centre is a roundel depicting Apollo with his horses, probably painted by Antonio Zucchi, who worked on many Adam projects (as did his wife, Angelica Kauffman). Surviving Chippendale accounts attest to the fact that Garrick commissioned furnishings to match the splendour of Adam's interiors – and that, like his architect friend, he rather overreached himself.

If Garrick ran out of sugar or witty company he could call on Topham Beauclerk, great-grandson of Charles II and Nell Gwynne and his neighbour at no. 3. Robert and James Adam themselves occupied no. 4, before moving on to 3 Robert Street. Their place in Royal Terrace was taken by 'doctor' James Graham, who installed his famous 'celestial bed' there, which promised to deliver, by means of electrical pulses, heightened sexual pleasure and fertility. One wonders how he got on with the likes of the 3rd Earl of Effingham, deputy Earl Marshal of England, who was the first occupant at no. 10.

By 1850, when *David Copperfield* was published, the Adelphi had clearly shifted from a highly desirable area to something less salubrious. Dickens has his hero lodging in nearby Buckingham Street, where the writer himself lived in 1834, and recalling of the time: 'I was fond of wandering about the Adelphi, because it was a mysterious place, with those dark arches.' Later that century Adam's Royal Terrace facade was Victorianised, and the building's fate sealed in 1864 with the construction of Victoria Embankment. The Adelphi was no longer a waterfront palace.

Apollo's tenancy on Robert Street was relatively short-lived. By 1933 the magazine had moved to Chancery Lane, three years before most of Adam's Adelphi was demolished. In its place, the architectural firm Collcutt & Hamp summoned New York and Chicago with a brawny art deco office building. Yet its mystical atmosphere seems to have lingered. Like Copperfield, the protagonist of E.M. Delafield's diaristic *Provincial Lady in Wartime* (1940) also lodges in Buckingham Street, finding herself drawn to an ARP station in 'Adelphi underworld': 'Descend lower and lower down concrete-paved slope – classical parallel here with Proserpina's excursion into Kingdom of Pluto – and emerge under huge vaults full of ambulances ranged in rows.' Sections of Adam's streets with their plaster griffins and pilasters of scrolling vegetation do remain, the elegant headquarters that he designed for the Royal Society of Arts chief among them. Its subterranean red-brick vaults are readily suggestive of encounters with the ghosts of Adam or Garrick. Or even, perhaps, of Diocletian. Ⓐ

Sophie Barling is senior editor of *Apollo*.



1. Engraving of the Adelphi from Walter Harrison's *History of London* (1775)

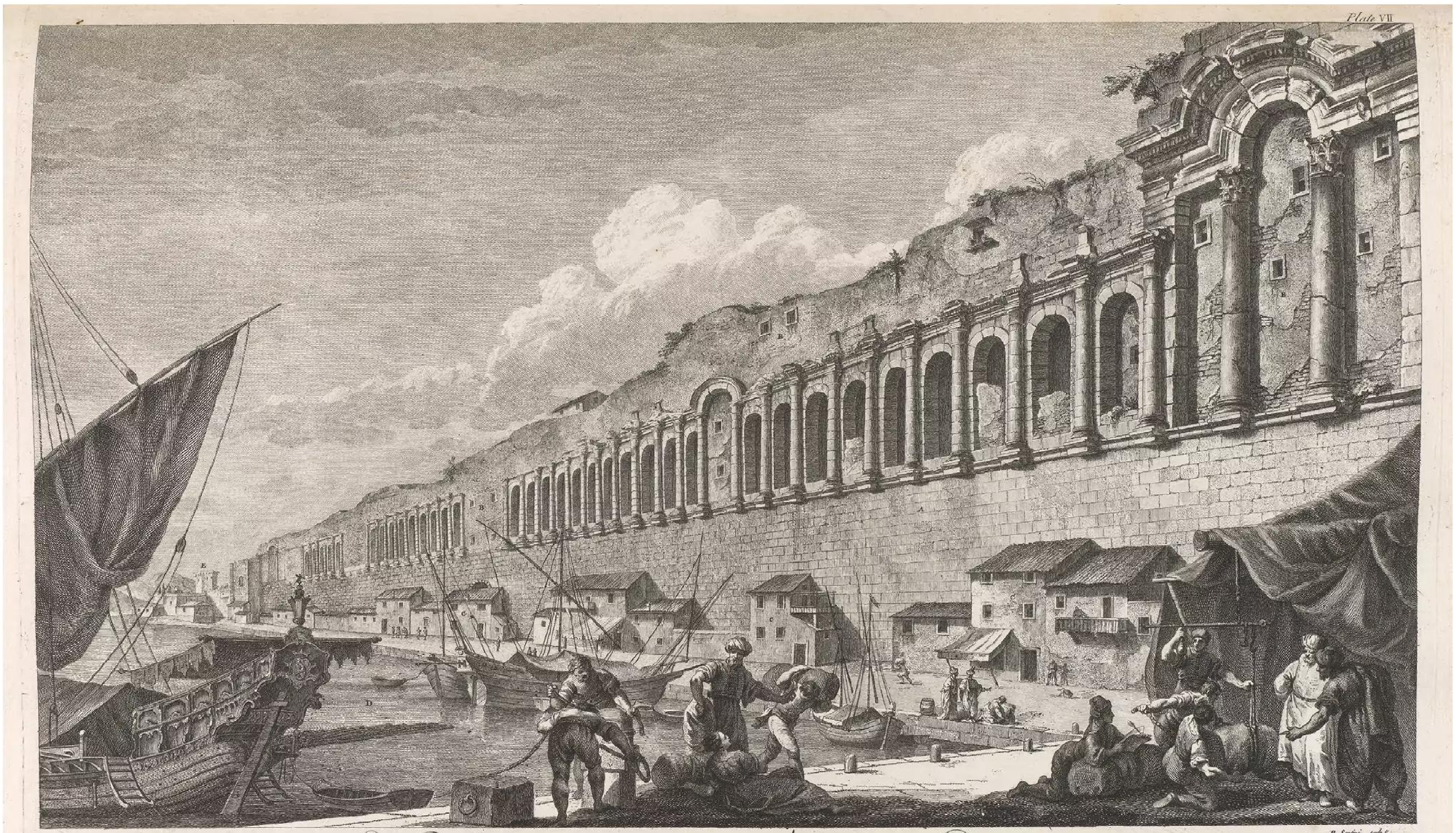


Plate VII
View of the Crypto Porticus or Front towards the Harbour
P. Santini sculp.

2. Plate from *Ruins of the palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro* (1764), Robert Adam (1728–92). Royal Collection Trust

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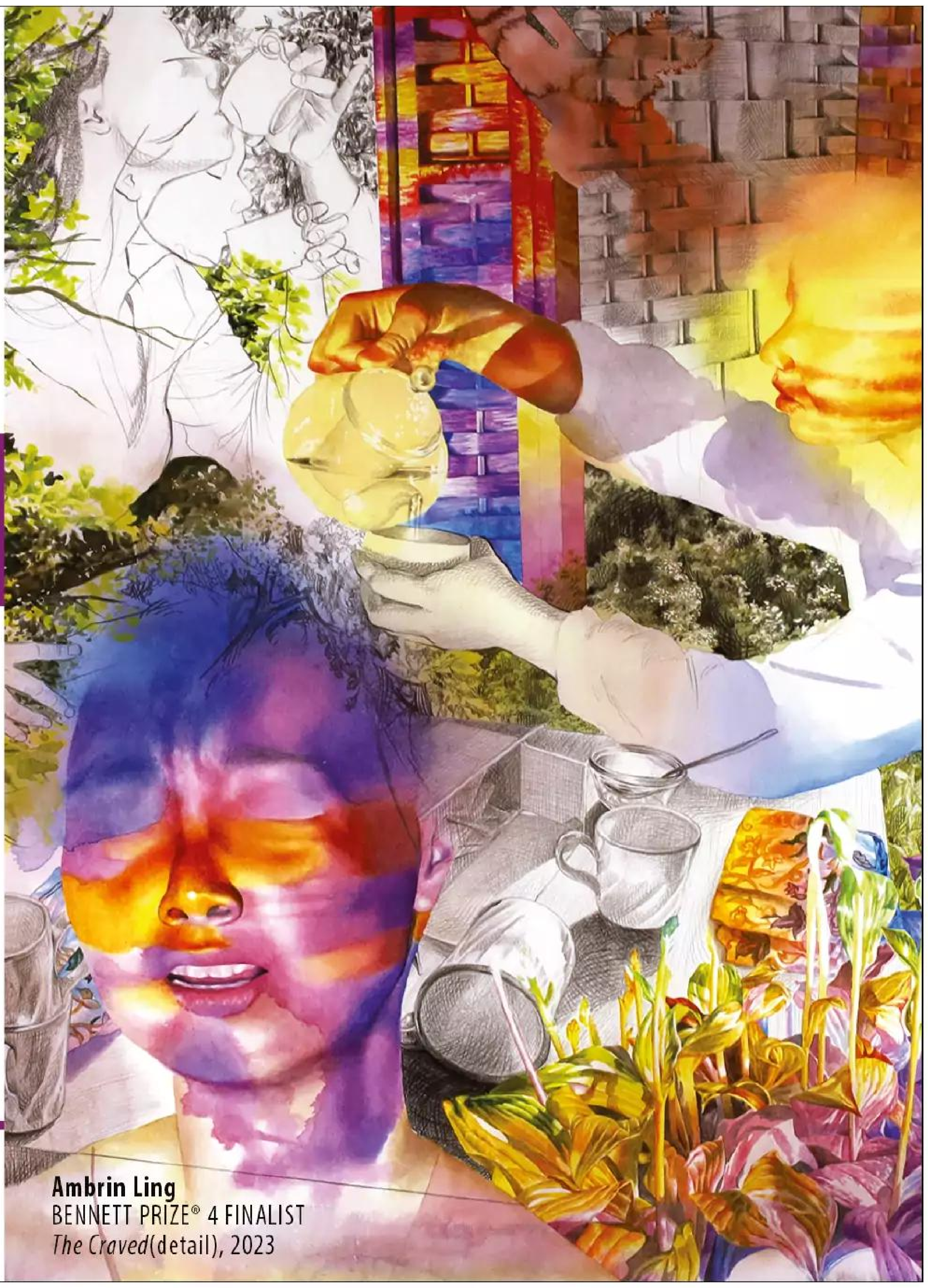

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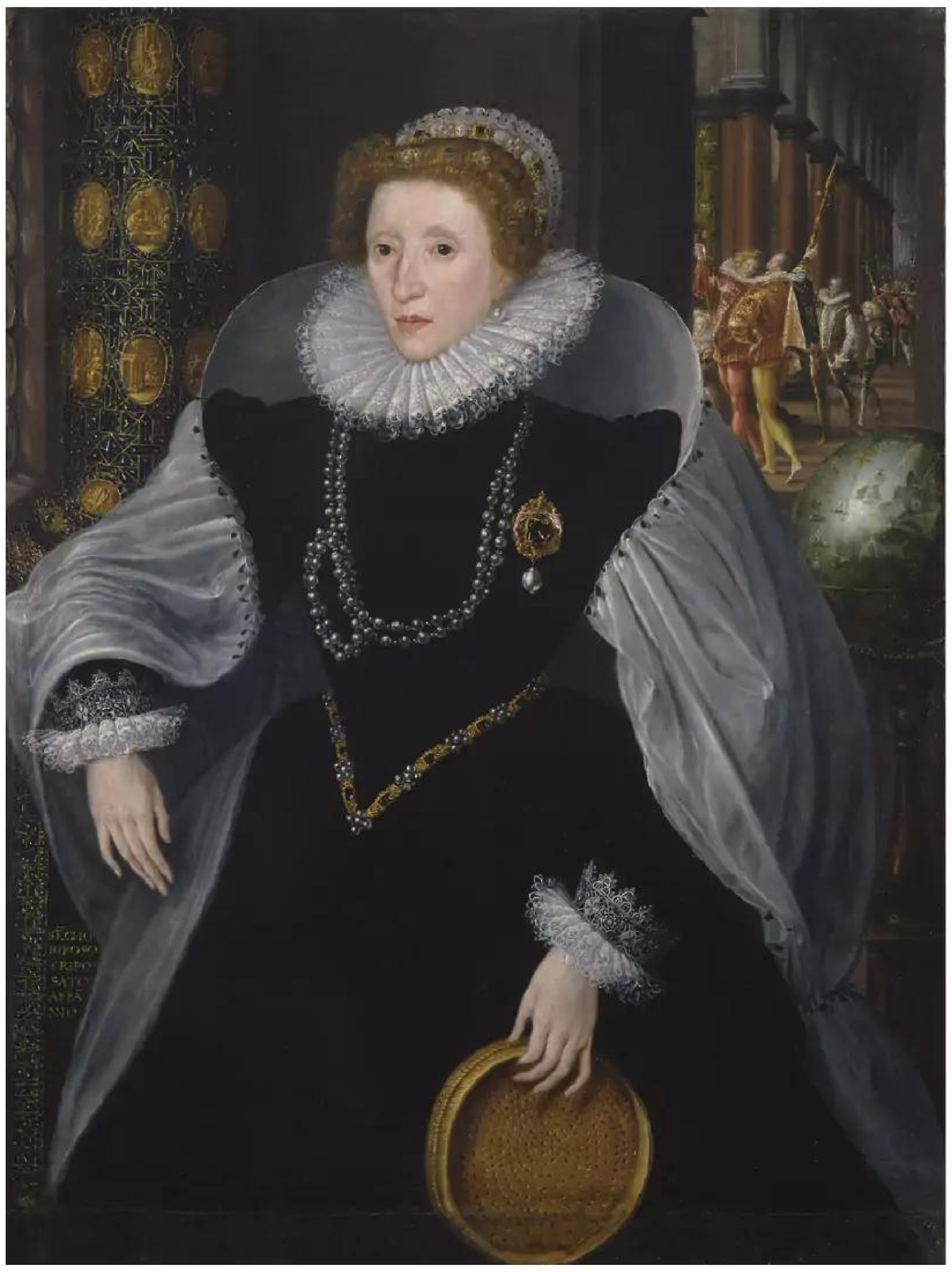
Food

Holier than thou

Elizabeth I was not known for her culinary skills, writes ***Bee Wilson****, so why was she painted holding a sieve?*



1. *Elizabeth I*, 1583, Quentin Metsys the Younger (1543–89), oil on canvas, 124.5 × 91.5cm. Musei Nazionali di Siena

You don't have to enjoy cooking to find significance in kitchen tools. Utensils have long been valued for their symbolism even by those who have never dirtied their hands at the stove. A case in point is Elizabeth I. There is a series of portraits – created by a number of artists between 1579 and 1590 – in which the queen holds a kitchen sieve. Elizabeth's sieve is a humble thing (unlike the dagger held by her father, Henry VIII, in his Holbein portraits), made not from precious metals but from a cheap brass-coloured metal called latten. It would be like the current King having his portrait done holding a blender.

The best of Elizabeth's sieve portraits is the one in the national art museum in Siena by the Flemish artist Quentin Metsys the Younger in 1583 (Fig. 1). Behind the queen we glimpse some male courtiers. At the front of the group, two courtiers with well-shaped calves in red and yellow stockings stare intensely into each other's eyes. Behind them is another man in less colourful attire with the badge of a white hind (a female deer) on his cloak. The queen, dressed in austere black, pays no attention to this scene behind her as she delicately fingers her sieve.

In Tudor households, sieves were far more essential than they are today. In conjunction with a pestle and mortar, sieves performed many of the jobs for which a modern cook might use an electric food processor. Judging from her rich dress and aloof demeanour, Elizabeth is not planning to use her sieve for any kind of labour. The purpose of her sieve is symbolic. But of what?

Going back to ancient times, sieves have been associated with wisdom, which is easy enough to understand. Sieves are tools for sorting wanted items from unwanted ones. In Renaissance iconography, the figure of Prudence (one of the four cardinal virtues) carried a sieve to underline her ability to sift good from evil. On the edge of the sieve in Elizabeth's Siena portrait there is a motto that translates as 'Down goes the good and the bad remains in the saddle.' Elizabeth is reminding her subjects that she is the arbiter of right and wrong; the sieve is a symbol of power disguised as a humble utensil.

Yet sieves also had another meaning: they were a well-worn motif for chastity, which is odd given that sieves are riddled with holes. The link goes back to a Roman story told about one of the Vestal Virgins, Tuccia, who was charged with 'the crime of unchastity'. She prayed to the goddess Vesta and then filled a sieve with water from the River Tiber. She carried it all the way back to the temple without spilling a drop. And thus her chastity was proved!

It isn't hard to see why this idea might have appealed to Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen. Throughout her reign she enhanced her authority with the notion that she had rejected worldly love in favour of her stately duties (while dangling the idea that she might marry, whether for the sake of a useful alliance or to produce an heir). The backdrop to the Siena Sieve Portrait was that it looked for a while as if she might finally give in to marriage. From 1579 to 1581, Elizabeth was being actively courted by François, Duke of Anjou.

Among members of the queen's court, her possible marriage to the French nobleman was controversial. One of those in the anti-marriage camp was Christopher Hatton, a courtier who almost certainly commissioned the Siena portrait. Hatton is thought to be the shadowy figure in the background with the hind on his cloak. Perhaps the men in the colourful stockings are scheming to marry the queen off and he is coming to stop them.

When you know that Hatton was probably the painting's patron, it takes on new connotations. Many observers (including Mary, Queen of Scots) said that he was Elizabeth's lover. She was known to have admired Hatton's dancing. Thanks to the queen's favours, Hatton grew so wealthy that he was able to build the largest privately owned house in England. This fact alone suggests that he had the queen's heart.

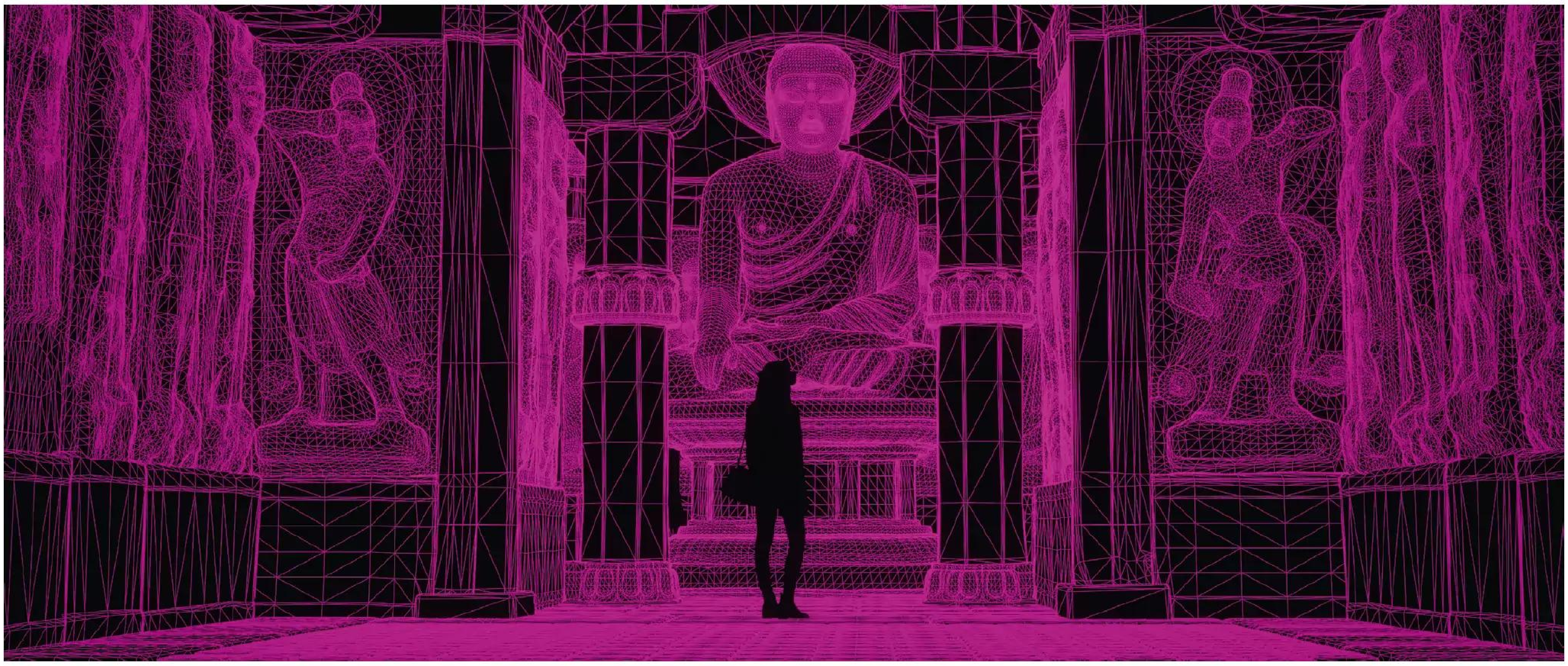
Then there is the brooch on the queen's dress, which went almost unremarked until 2014 when two art historians, Christine Slottved Kimbriel and Henrietta McBurney, analysed it. It displays a naked man and woman, touching hands. At the base is the head of a ram (in letters between them, Hatton called himself the queen's 'sheep'). The sexiness of the brooch is at odds with the queen's all-encompassing black dress, and may have been a very 'deliberate and personal' comment by Hatton about his relationship with the queen.

Public chastity could be a veil for private love. Assuming that Hatton and the queen were lovers – not that we will ever know – the sieve could be not only a public declaration of purity but also a coded love token. Maybe the yellow metal sieve that the queen is fingering so pensively is, among other things, a giant golden ring, an absurdly oversized gesture of love from Hatton to his royal mistress.

Bee Wilson is the author of *The Heart-Shaped Tin: Love, Loss and Kitchen Objects* (Fourth Estate).

Courtesy Italian Ministry of Culture – Foto Archivo Musei Nazionali di Siena

Korean art scans new horizons



A wireframe image of *Seokguram Hyperreal* (2025) at K-Art Lab

Courtesy Technology Research Institute for Culture and Heritage

Korea has something of a reputation for balancing respect for deep-rooted tradition with a capacity for innovation. It's a duality that sits at the heart of 'Korean Culture, Now!', a year-long initiative organised by the Korean Cultural Centre UK (KCCUK) that aims to bridge Korea's past, present and future through a range of immersive spaces and musical displays in London.

Korea has long shaped global trends and tastes through sheer artistry – particularly, in recent years, through finely honed pop music. But though K-pop deservedly draws attention, it shouldn't obscure the country's rich musical traditions – after all, BTS, Blackpink, Stray Kids et al. didn't arise in a vacuum. 'Soundwaves of Science: Exploring the Science of Korean Music', organised in collaboration with the National Science Museum of Korea and now open at the KCCUK in London (until 27 June), provides a remarkable opportunity to get to grips with Korean musical history. A wide range of instruments, particularly percussion, are available for visitors to play, including the *pyeongyeong*, a set of 16 carefully sculpted stones hung on a wooden frame and tapped with a cow-horn implement, and the *janggu*, a double-headed hourglass-shaped drum which, when struck by hand or stick, produces a deeply satisfying sound. Both have been used in Korean court rituals for a millennium or so.

If this interactive display links Korea's past and present, 'Endless Bonds: AI and Korean Heritage' (17 July–22 August at the KCCUK) brings the country's past into the future. Organised in collaboration with the National Museum of Korea, a series of immersive digital offerings gives viewers a chance to lose themselves in a range of settings, from age-old landscapes to 18th-century historical scenes. In *Endless Mountains and Rivers: A Prosperous World Unfolds in Nature*, the 18th-century tradition of 'true view' landscape painting – which depicted real places in all their scenic detail – is presented panoramically; the effect is not unlike a handscroll of an idealised landscape.

Meanwhile, *Royal Procession with the People* celebrates a more artificial sort of beauty. It brings to life two settings: King Jeongjo's procession in 1795 to Hwaseong, a city near Korea's north-western coast, and a banquet he held the following year to celebrate the completion of Hwaseong Fortress, which remains in magnificent condition today. Just as the scale, sophistication and opulence of the procession were meant to impress upon ordinary people the power of the Korean state, this animation – informed by archival records and paintings from the time – is intended to astonish contemporary viewers with a dose of Korean historical culture at its headiest.

Other immersive recreations are available courtesy of the K-Art Lab, currently at the KCCUK and soon to tour the UK. *Seokguram Hyperreal* animates a Buddhist stone temple from the eighth century in high definition, conjuring not just the edifice's geometric design and intricate carvings but also the play of daylight and candlelight on granite. *Sorabol 1000* is broader in scope: it reconstructs the historic city of Sorabol right down to its topography, vegetation, architecture and everyday material culture, taking enough artistic licence to make it an enjoyably navigable experience for visitors.

Aside from its artificial creations, South Korea is replete with stunning natural vistas. 'Strolling through Korean Gardens' (11 September–14 November at the KCCUK) does justice to the country's verdant landscapes by digitally creating a pavilion from which a series of lush gardens can be viewed. The installation, produced in collaboration with the Korea Heritage Service, is intended to foster not just a tranquil, appreciative mood but also an active engagement with the natural world, however artificial its means of presentation.

Before it unveils all these immersive landscapes, the KCCUK is making a mission statement of sorts on 9 June at the K-Culture Forum at the Royal Society of Arts in London. Talks about various aspects of Korean cultural influence are being given by Seunghye Sun, director of the KCCUK; Dobin Choi, a lecturer of Korean and comparative philosophy at Leiden University; and Seungkyu Ryan Lee, co-founder of the Pinkfong Company – best-known for producing the extraordinarily catchy children's tune 'Baby Shark'.

Sun sums up 'Korean Culture, Now!' as a whole: 'Through cutting-edge technology and within a thoughtful historical framework, this initiative reveals the emotional depth and resonance of Korea's diverse cultural expressions.' With all the artistic, musical and technological displays on offer for the rest of the year, you'd be hard-pressed to disagree.

Visit kccuk.org.uk/en to find out more.

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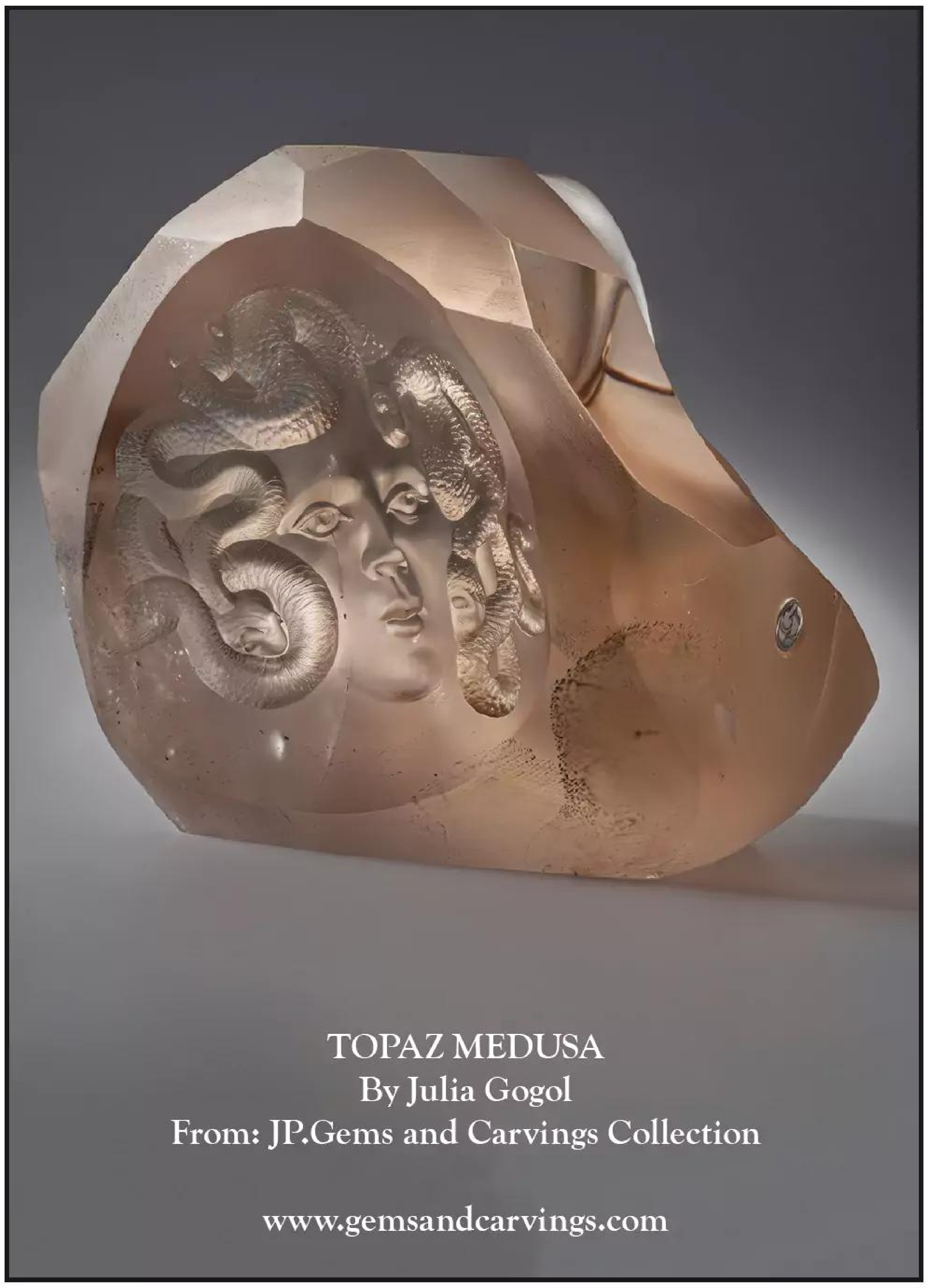

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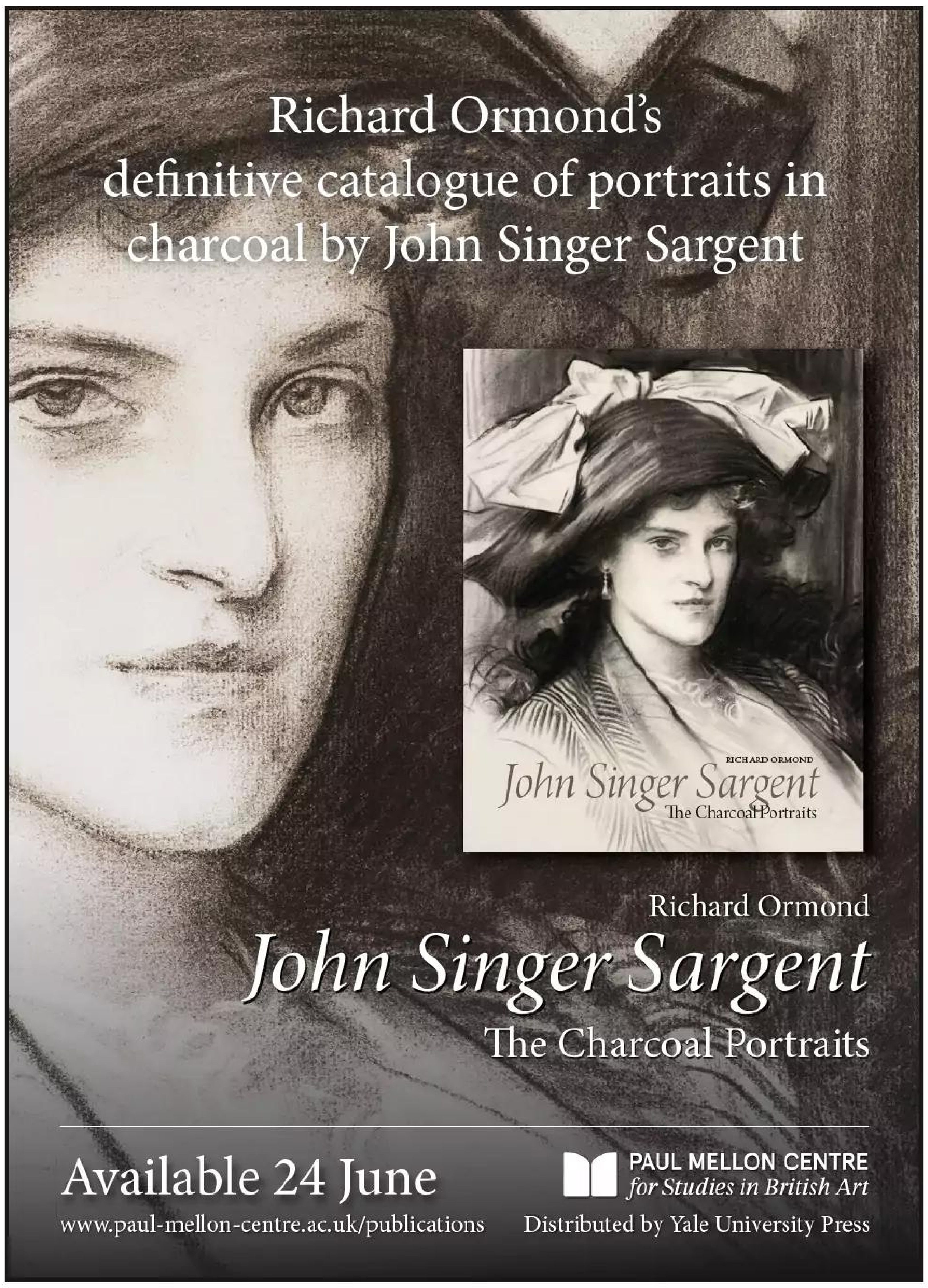

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Case study

One Navarra winery is thriving, thanks in part to its art collection and artist-designed labels, writes ***Christina Makris***

In the Navarra region of Spain, just over the Pyrenees from France, lies Bodega Otazu – the northernmost vineyard with the highest quality rating in the Spanish appellation system. It sits at a crossroads between centuries of French and Spanish traditions of viticultural exchange. The winery – built in 1840 in Bordelais chateau style – is eight km out of Pamplona, only 60km from the Bay of Biscay and 35km from the Pyrenees. More recently, its geographical advantages have been supplemented by a display of contemporary art. Guillermo Penso, the bodega's owner, has scattered his collection throughout the grounds, cellar and working areas of the winery. Wine and art 'are both cultural products, they both tell messages, they're both reflections of their own time,' he says.

1. The barrel cellar, 'La Catedral del Vino', at Bodega Otazu, Navarra

Navarra is now landlocked, but the medieval kingdom of Navarre once stretched along Spain's northern coast and over the Pyrenees towards Bordeaux. Its winemaking tradition was started by Cistercian monks in the 12th century. Records show that Carlos III 'El Noble', king of Navarre from 1387–1425, drank wines produced in Otazu. The region sat on the pilgrim route, the Camino de Santiago de Compostela and pilgrims also spread *Navarra rosado* (rosé), turning it into a popular trade commodity.

Navarra's openness to trade made it one of the earliest wine regions in Spain to be ravaged by phylloxera in the late 19th century. This destructive pest destroyed the region's vineyards, wiping out 99 per cent of the wine production in 1891–96. It never fully bounced back and today only 10,500 hectares of vineyards remain, with just 110 hectares in Pamplona, all belonging to Bodega Otazu.

The Spanish-Venezuelan Penso family bought Otazu in 1994. At the time it was a 250-hectare farm without vines; under the stewardship of Guillermo, regenerative and vinicultural development had elevated Otazu by 2009 to the status of *Vino de Pago*. This is the most exclusive classification in the Spanish system, awarded to just a few wineries – at present, 19 of them; Otazu was the seventh. *Pago* wines are produced by a single vineyard, which is awarded the distinction in recognition of unique microclimatic conditions and soil characteristics, resulting in wines that maintain a high quality over time and age well. Otazu's entire wine range is made with grape varieties grown in this single-estate vineyard – Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Berués de Huarte.

The working parts of the winery are underground: the spectacular barrel cellar, known as the 'La Catedral del Vino', is dominated by a 14th-century press that resembles an altar; the first wine produced, in 1999, was named the 'Altar' in its honour (Fig. 1). Above ground, the estate contains the 12th-century Romanesque church of San Esteban, which features a 16th-century altarpiece in the 'plateresque' style, a 14th-century tower and the 16th-century Palace of Otazu, now the family residence.

A family friend, the Venezuelan artist Carlos Cruz-Diez, who died in 2019, convinced the family to formalise its connection to the arts: 'Tell them you've got this plot of land in between a 12th-century cathedral and a 14th-century pigeon tower and ask them what they could do with the place.' To display the art, Penso initiated a biennial competition for the best work of monumental art. The work is spread throughout the grounds and includes the water and glass work *The Colour of Our Lives* (2015) by Alfredo Jaar; the musical installation *Valkyries of Otazu* (2017) by Leandro Erlich and the sculptural works *Tools + Fire* by Jim Dine (2010) and *Au Soleil* by Baltasar Lobo (1988).

As Penso says, 'We buy the works, not the artists.' The family displays only about 10 per cent of the 2,000-strong collection, which includes work by Tomás Saraceno, Rashid Johnson, David Magán and Ai Weiwei, but the art is regularly rotated. Art and wine are connected for Penso because they 'both cater to human craving and search for human soul'.

The winery produces one of Navarra's most expensive wines, the Vitral de Otazu, made from Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Each grape is carefully selected in a manual harvest, guaranteeing superior quality; then the grapes are destemmed by hand and undergo cold maceration followed by fermentation for 15 days in 225-litre French oak barrels, which are rotated six times a day. They are then macerated again for three weeks and pressed, before undergoing secondary malolactic fermentation in barrels for two months at 15°C.

The artist Manolo Valdés believes that these 'wines are endowed with unlimited personality'. His label for this wine was inspired by his sculpture *Ariadna* (2007). Ariadne was abandoned by Theseus on Naxos after helping him to escape from Crete, and was discovered there by Dionysus, the god of wine and revelry, who fell in love and took her as his wife. She became immortal and a constellation as a result of their union, and gave birth to a son called Oenopion (*oinos* being the Greek for wine).

The most ambitious artistic connection to Vitral wine is the collaboration with Carlos Cruz-Diez, who created 30 specially designed labels for vintages – one for each year running from 2013 to 2042 – in a project he called *Otazu Chromointerferences*. Each bottle or group of bottles comes in a case and the 30 cases can be assembled as a sculpture, stacked, restacked, ensuring myriad possibilities for experiencing the artist's work. This was a fitting way to honour 'the Maestro' Cruz-Diez, but also makes the connection between art and wine even closer. As Pensa says, 'Let's give people a great piece of art you can drink.'

Christina Makris is the author of *Aesthetic Dining: The Art Restaurant Around the World* (Cultureshock).

Photo: © Bodega Otazu

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TWIST

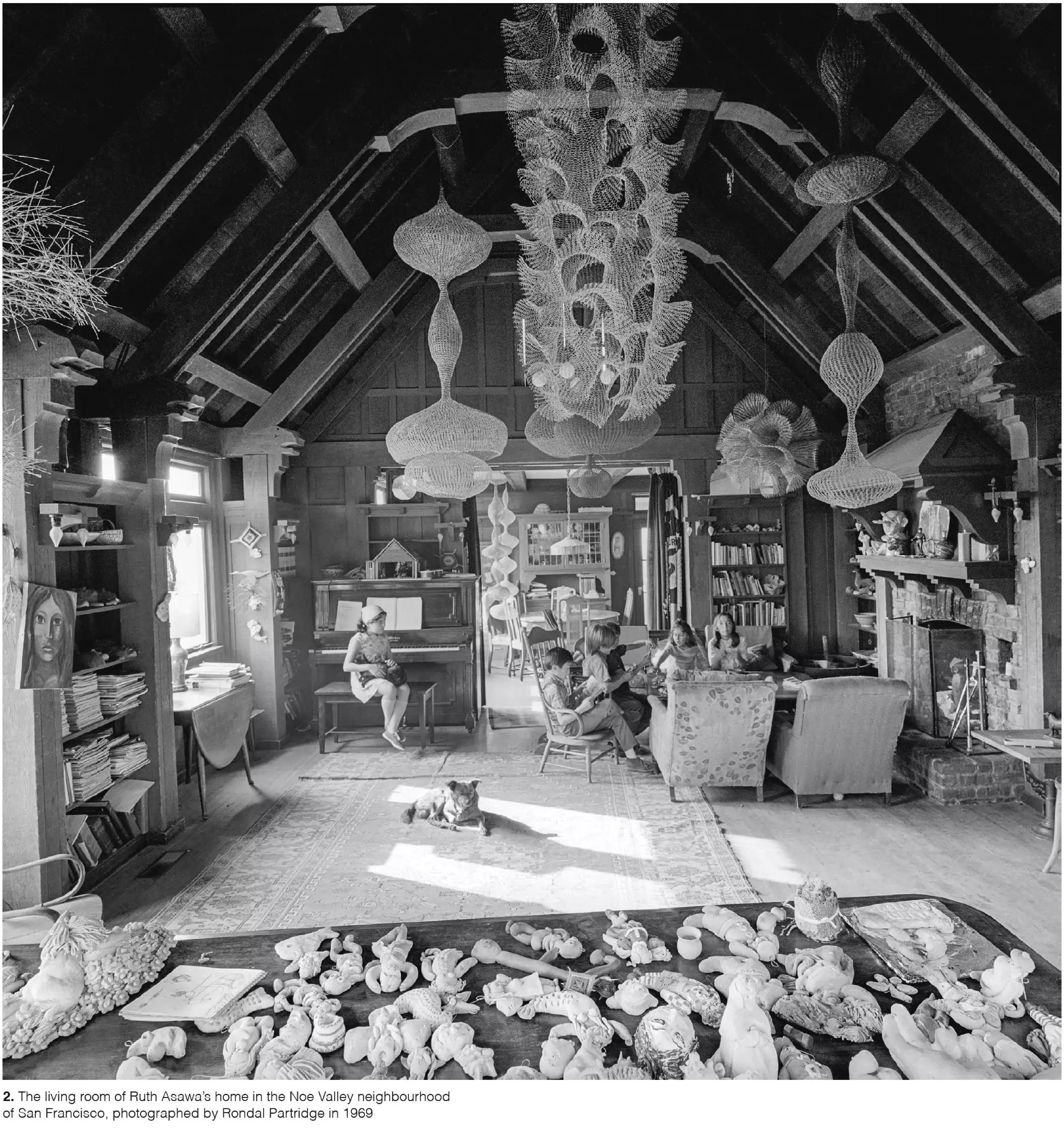
In the course of an unconventional career, Ruth Asawa mixed abstract wire sculpture with populist public commissions. As her reputation soars, it's her generosity of spirit, as much as her inventiveness, that shines through

By Jonathan Griffin

1. Installation view of ‘Ruth Asawa: Retrospective’, at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2025

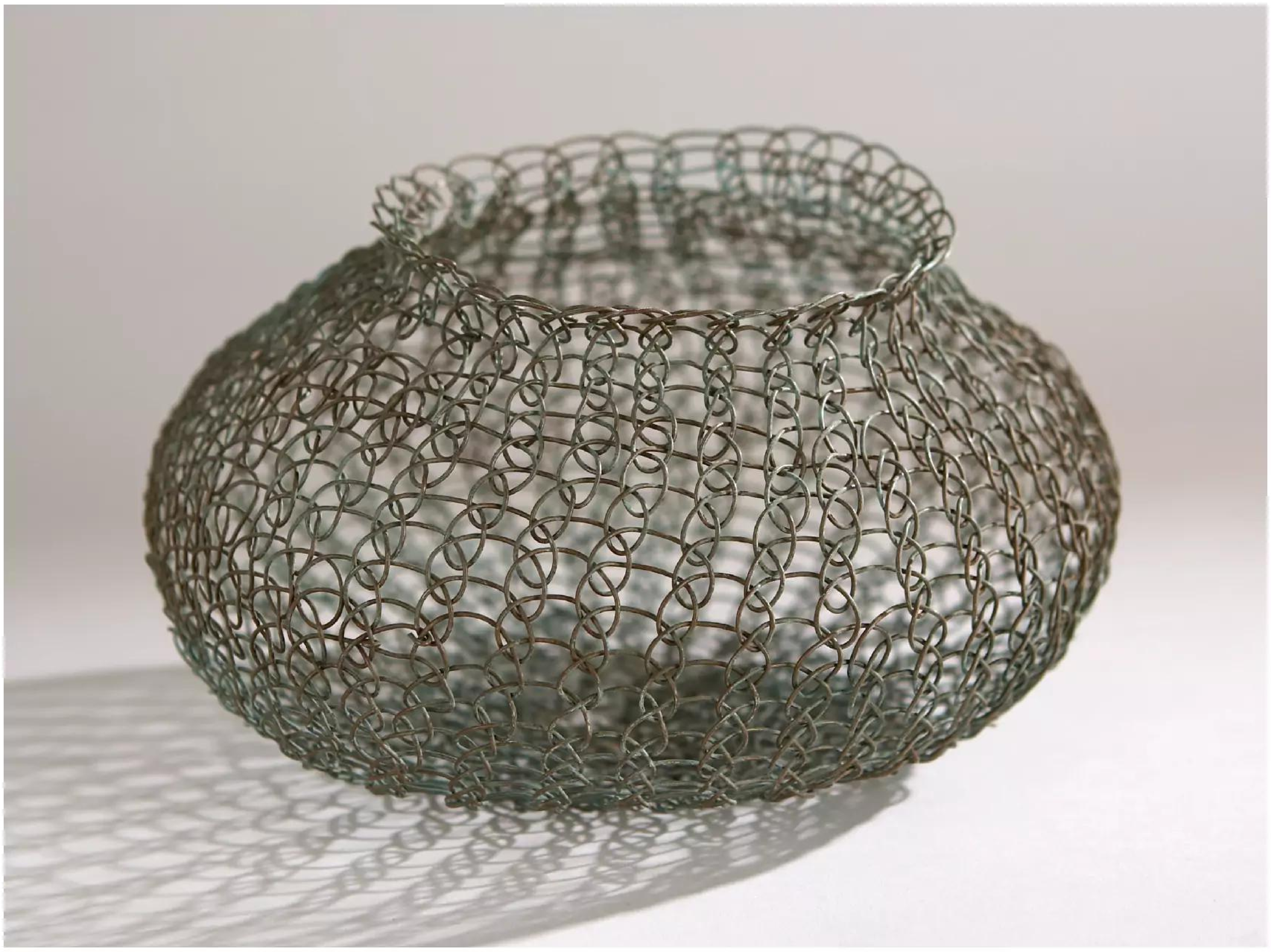
AND

TURN



2. The living room of Ruth Asawa's home in the Noe Valley neighbourhood of San Francisco, photographed by Rondal Partridge in 1969

Previous spread photo: Don Ross; courtesy David Zwirner; © 2025 Ruth Asawa Lanier, Inc.; this page photo: © 2025 Rondal Partridge Archive



3. *Untitled (S.363, Freestanding Basket)*, *c.* 1948, Ruth Asawa (1926–2013), copper wire, 11.4 × 19.1 × 19.7cm. Asheville Art Museum

The black-and-white photograph shows a wood-panelled room with a pitched roof of dark redwood beams. A low table is pushed cosily up against a large brick hearth, and around it several children sit in easy chairs, one reading, others busily engaged in craft activities. At a piano, a girl strokes a cat, while a dog basks in the sunlight that slants across a large rug (Fig. 2). This peaceful scene is the San Francisco living room of the artist Ruth Asawa (1926–2013), photographed in 1969. Asawa is nowhere to be seen, but her art is everywhere. Most conspicuous are the hanging wire sculptures for which Asawa is best known. Resembling elaborate lanterns or lighting fixtures, or biomorphic models of seed-pods or chrysalises, or complex fishing nets, or baskets, these sculptures fill the darkened space beneath the high rafters with miasmic, playful movement, catching the light as it filters through the window.

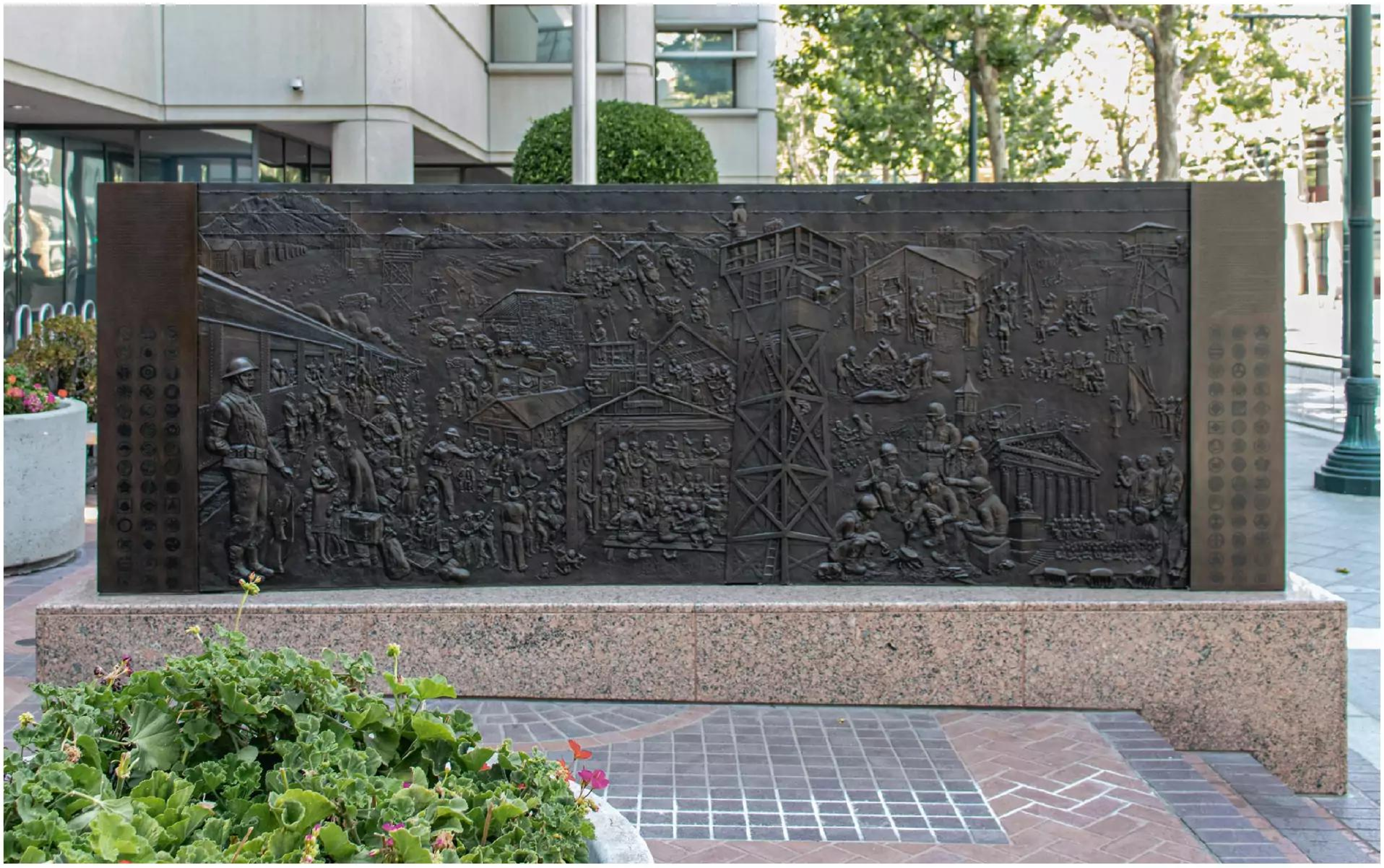
Close scrutiny of the photograph, however, reveals a much fuller picture of Asawa's output than is often recognised. In the immediate foreground, a wooden surface (actually the top of a second piano, out-of-tune and unplayed) is crowded with white clay sculptures, including animals, flowers, faces, fantastical figures and a small pot. Many of these were made by Asawa's children; the artist used an inexpensive mix of flour, water and salt to make 'baker's clay', a medium she would sometimes cast into bronze, as she did for several well-loved (though critically scorned) commissions of public sculpture.

Despite the predominance of her abstract, meditative, woven sculptures, Asawa built her world around people, family and sociality. Her earliest training was as a teacher and, a year before this photograph was taken, she helped launch the Alvarado School Arts Workshop at her children's school; the programme bringing artists into the classroom would expand to reach more than 50 schools. Asawa was generous and pragmatic – an approach that she may have acquired while studying at the progressive, pan-disciplinary Black Mountain College in the 1940s – and far from the purist that her most famous work might suggest. She had scant regard for binaries, but instead conjoined craft and fine art, tradition and modernity, functionality and uselessness, individualism and collaboration, figuration and abstraction, daily life and creativity.

Evidence of Asawa's generosity and imagination fills a retrospective of the artist at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), which opened on 5 April and will travel later this year to MoMA in New York, then on to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and the Fondation Beyeler in Switzerland. Along with this celebration of her art and a re-evaluation of her contribution to the story of Western modernism comes a significant widening of the scholarship and understanding of Asawa's life and work.

Asawa died in 2013, at the age of 87. Despite having been included in the 1959 show 'Recent Sculpture U.S.A.' at MoMA in New York, and having had a retrospective of her work in San Francisco in 1973, she was never widely known outside the latter city. She spent much of the 1970s and '80s focusing on public sculpture and arts education, and sold her work infrequently. Then, in 2008,

Photo: Christie's; courtesy David Zwirner; © Ruth Asawa Lanier, Inc.



4. *Japanese American Internment Memorial (PC.011)*, designed by Ruth Asawa in 1990–94, stands outside the Robert Peckham Federal Building in San José

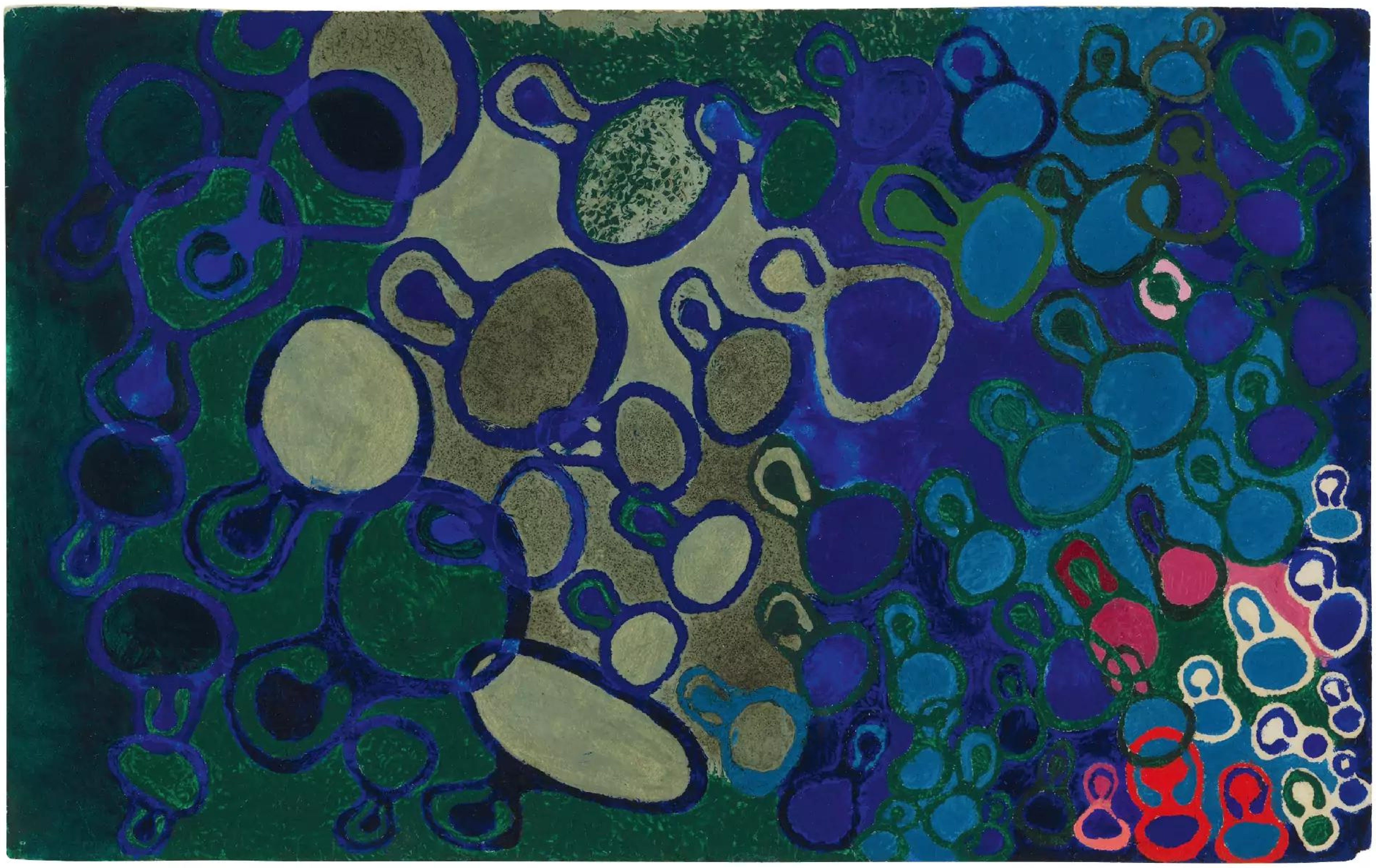
Asawa's daughter contacted Christie's to discuss the sale of a painting by Asawa's old friend and teacher, Josef Albers, in order to raise money for her healthcare. Jonathan Laib, a specialist at Christies, saw Asawa's work and, in 2010, oversaw the sale of one of her sculptures that went for $578,500, more than three times its high estimate. Three years later, just months before her death, both Christie's and Sotheby's sold works by Asawa for over $1 million. In 2017, Laib began working at David Zwirner, bringing to the gallery representation of Asawa's estate. Her wire sculptures now regularly fetch $4m–$6m.

It's easy to see why these elegant and original pieces are so beloved by collectors. But this wide-ranging retrospective and its thick and deeply researched catalogue are full of titbits that illuminate Asawa's uneven career path and her bohemian life. For instance: that cat in the photograph, purring on the little girl's lap, did not belong to the Asawa family, but had presumably just wandered into their home, where the tall, carved front doors were reportedly usually open. Four of those children are not Asawa's, but their friends. (Asawa, with her husband, Albert Lanier, did indeed have six children, but only the youngest two are pictured here.) The especially comfy patterned armchair was known as the 'peace chair'. On the piano sits a model of this very room, built by Asawa's young son, for which she contributed a tiny version of one of her hanging sculptures, woven specially from fine-gauge wire. (In later life, she made several such miniatures, a case of which is installed at SFMOMA.) Asawa usually hung her large-scale sculptures, when she was working on them, from a hook under the lintel of the door between this room and the kitchen-dining room beyond, a convenient spot from where she could keep an eye on dinner.

The living-room photograph itself appears in the retrospective, dramatically enlarged to immersive proportions and forming the centrepiece of a wood-panelled gallery designed to recall Asawa's home. There are her hanging wire sculptures, some of which can be identified in the photo; the most impressive of these is *Untitled (S.039, Hanging Five Spiraling Columns of Open Windows)* (*c.* 1959–60), a convoluted construction more than two metres tall comprising a sequence of unfurling apertures, rather than the enclosed lobes of other sculptures. Those twin front doors, which Asawa carved from redwood planks in 1961 with help from her kids, are installed nearby. There are several of the fired clay life-masks that Asawa liked to make of her friends and family, which she hung on a cedar-shingled outside wall. There are artworks by Asawa's contemporaries, including stoneware bowls by Marguerite Wildenhain, with whom Asawa had shown in a 1954 exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art titled 'Four Artist-Craftsmen'. (The designation of 'craft', used pejoratively, would follow Asawa throughout her career, to her indifference.) There is a geometric watercolour from 1947 by Albers inscribed to her. There are clay bead necklaces, made by Asawa in the 1980s and fired by her son Paul in a pit on a nearby beach. And there are bronze casts of Asawa's tiny, industrious hands, originally made in wax in 1974 and then cast into metal five years after her death.

Asawa was born in Norwalk, south-east of Los Angeles, today incorporated as a city but in 1926 little more than a patchwork of farms. Asawa's Japanese immigrant parents leased their small farm, since California's Alien Land Law

Photo: Laurence Cuneo; courtesy David Zwirner; © Ruth Asawa Lanier, Inc.



5. *Untitled (BMC. 56, Dancers)*, *c.* 1948–49, Ruth Asawa, oil and gouache on paper, 30.5 × 48.3cm. Private collection

barred them from ownership, and their seven children went to work in the fields each day after school. The family had horses and chickens, and grew beans, tomatoes, onions, daikon and other crops. In early 1942, weeks after Japan attacked the US fleet in Pearl Harbor, FBI agents visited the farm and arrested Asawa's father, who was incarcerated in camps in New Mexico until after the war. Two months later, just as the strawberries were ripening, the rest of the family was ordered to report to the Santa Anita detention facility east of Los Angeles, a former racetrack converted into rudimentary accommodation which they shared with more than 18,000 other detainees.

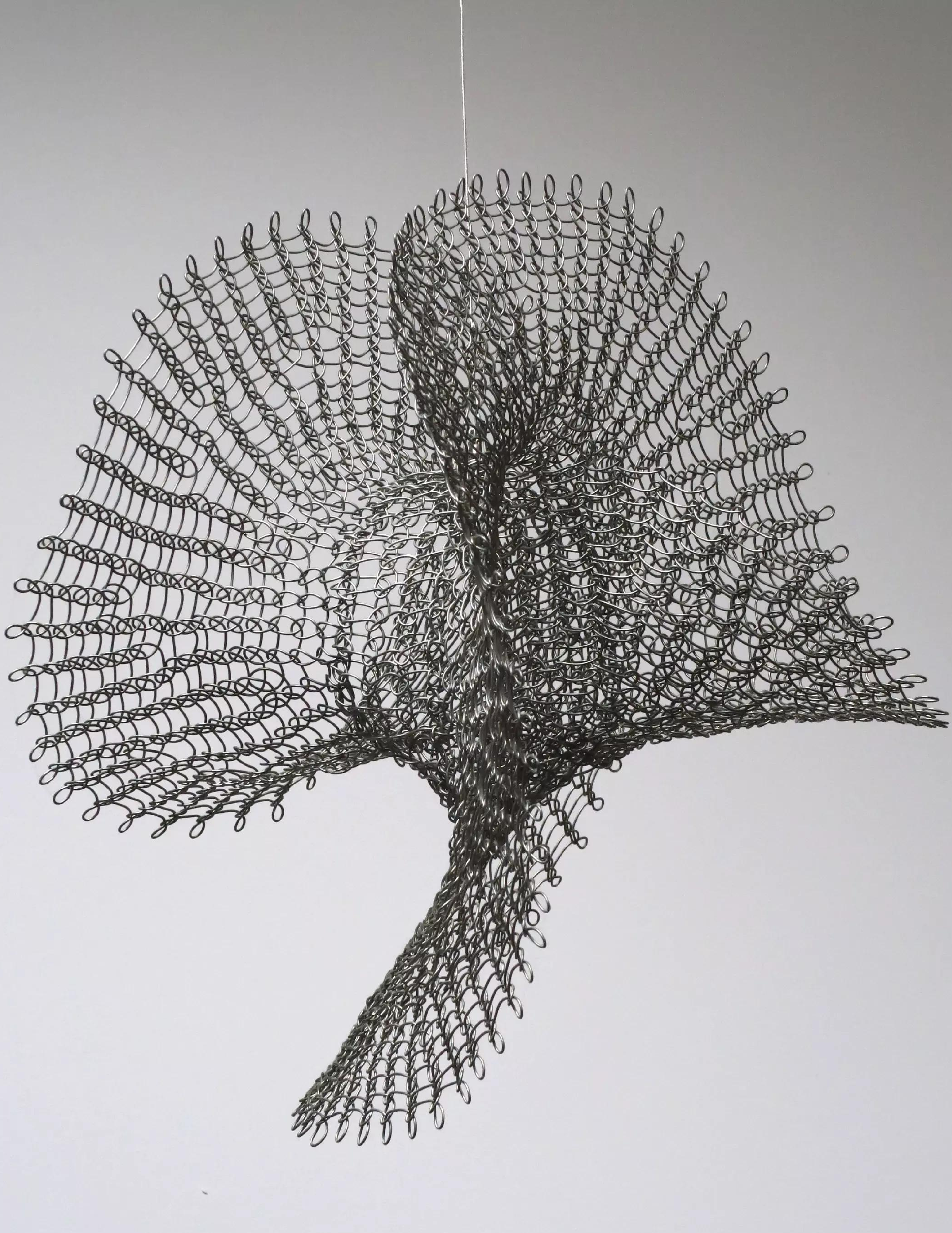
Half a century later, Asawa returned to those traumatic adolescent experiences while designing a major public art commission for the federal courthouse in San José, California, which commemorated the US government's incarceration of more than 120,000 people of Japanese descent during the Second World War (Fig. 4). A two-sided relief mural, cast in bronze but originally sculpted in baker's clay, narrated the arrival of immigrants from Japan in the United States, their settlement and work on farms, their displacement and hurried abandonment of their homes and the grim conditions inside the camps. Asawa drew heavily on her own life, including a poignant scene in which her father set fire to the family's traditional Japanese possessions, including books and a doll, in order to erase evidence of his heritage.

The folksy, illustrational style of the *Japanese Internment Memorial* (1990–94) is, like other of Asawa's public commissions, awkward to correlate with her abstract work. It is not even a case of an evolving (or devolving) aesthetic; as early as the late 1960s she was designing large-scale figurative sculptures, such as her mermaid fountain, *Andrea* (1966–68), for the city's Ghirardelli Square, while separately developing her elegant, abstract vocabulary of natural forms in wire and bronze, which she continued throughout her life. *Andrea* consists of two mermaid figures – cast from the torso of Asawa's friend Andrea Jepson – surrounded by turtles and frogs on lily pads. Asawa spoke of her ambition 'to make a sculpture that could be enjoyed by everyone'. Lawrence Halprin, the modernist landscape architect redeveloping Ghirardelli Square at that time, hated the fountain – which he described, not unreasonably, as 'corny' and 'high camp'. Two of the contributors to the SFMOMA catalogue, Jennie Yoon and Marci Kwon, attempt a defence, pointing to Asawa's use of her wire-weaving technique to sculpt the mermaids' tails, her 'rejoinder to the essentialism of categorisation'. Maybe. But there's no doubt that such populist public sculptures pose a problem for historians of Asawa's oeuvre.

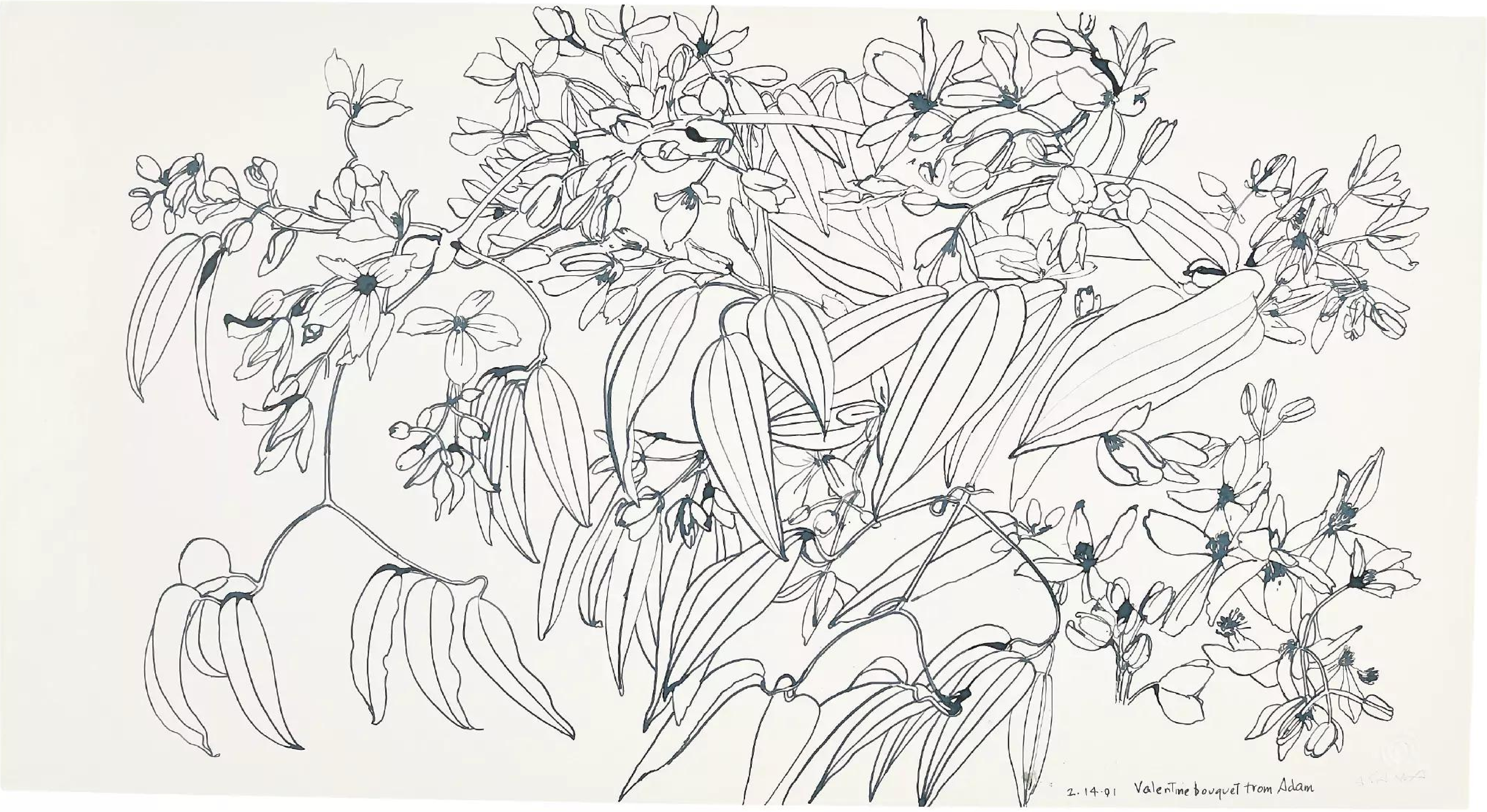
To fully understand the inconvenient variety of Asawa's work, it is helpful to reflect on the lifelong influence of her early art education. In 1943, she was permitted to leave the internment camp in Arkansas where her family had been held, in order to enrol at Milwaukee State Teachers College. Due to rife anti-Japanese sentiment, the college refused to find her a practice placement, effectively preventing her from graduating. The sister of a classmate, however, told her of a radical, residential liberal arts college in North Carolina. In 1946, Asawa applied and was accepted into Black Mountain College.

At Black Mountain, students were required to grow and cook their own food and to participate in construction

Courtesy David Zwirner; © Ruth Asawa Lanier, Inc.



6. *Untitled (S. 428, Hanging Möbius Strip), c.* 1960,
Ruth Asawa, nickel-plated copper wire, 40 × 38.1 × 27.9cm.
Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany



7. *Valentine Bouquet from Adam (PF.555)*, 1991, Ruth Asawa, ink on paper, 31.8 × 58.4cm. Private collection

projects. Asawa the resourceful farm girl took to life at the college with zeal. She learned drawing, colour theory, design, mathematics, philosophy and music. She also studied dance in the summer of 1948 with choreographer Merce Cunningham. Asawa became close with the architect Buckminster Fuller, who designed her wedding ring: a silver cage holding a round, black river stone. Influential, too, was the teaching and friendship of German exiles Josef and Anni Albers, who had lost their jobs at the Bauhaus when it was forced to close by the Nazi party. Josef taught a compulsory design class at Black Mountain, in which he asked students to experiment with folding paper and bending wire; Anni taught weaving.

It was in a market in Toluca, west of Mexico City, that Asawa first saw egg baskets woven in wire, and learned from a local teacher how to loop and join the wire without the need for needles or hooks. Back in North Carolina, she practised the technique and soon was able to create voluminous, sturdy but flexible forms. The earliest wire pieces in Asawa's retrospective are a plump basket (Fig. 3) and an oval platter, both made in 1948; while she was simultaneously creating colourful, abstract paintings in oil and watercolour, these woven pieces appeared more like traditional craft wares than avant-garde painting.

'Nature is my teacher,' Asawa later wrote. At Black Mountain, she met and fell in love with Albert Lanier, an architect who shared her fascination with botany. When, in 1948, Lanier moved to San Francisco to embark on his architecture career, Asawa followed and, in 1949, only months after California repealed its anti-miscegenation laws, the couple were married. In their various successive homes in San Francisco the couple cultivated thriving gardens, and Asawa studied their plants and flowers in careful pen drawings and watercolours (Fig. 7). Generosity underpinned Asawa's art: if someone gifted her a bouquet, she would often draw the flowers and present the drawing to the friend in exchange. In 1962, a friend brought her a dried plant specimen from Death Valley, which she found impossible to draw. Instead, she tied bundles of wire together into soft-edged, organic forms – a technique that blossomed into its own body of abstract sculpture.

Meanwhile, her hanging, woven sculptures became increasingly elaborate and complex, usually involving successive volumes inside one another or, in some instances, magically intersecting (Fig. 1). She acknowledged their mind-boggling complexity in a hanging piece, *UNTITLED (S.428, Hanging Möbius Strip)* (*c.* 1960; Fig. 6), a manifestation of the famous mathematical model which joins interior and exterior to create one continuous surface with a single edge. In the 1950s, when she undertook commercial design projects, she had devised a circular logo, an emblem she held dear throughout her life. This 'Continuous Form within a Form', as she called it, consists of looping concentric rings. Asawa's looped-wire sculptures were always made with a continuous surface: two dimensions woven into three. In this regard, they encapsulate Asawa's philosophy, as improbable syntheses of oppositional qualities. But they were only part of her story. As this exhibition shows, to tell one part without the other would be a disservice to the rich variety of Asawa's long and irrepressible life.

Jonathan Griffin is a writer in Los Angeles.

'Ruth Asawa: Retrospective' is at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art until 2 September (www.sfmoma.org), before travelling to other venues.

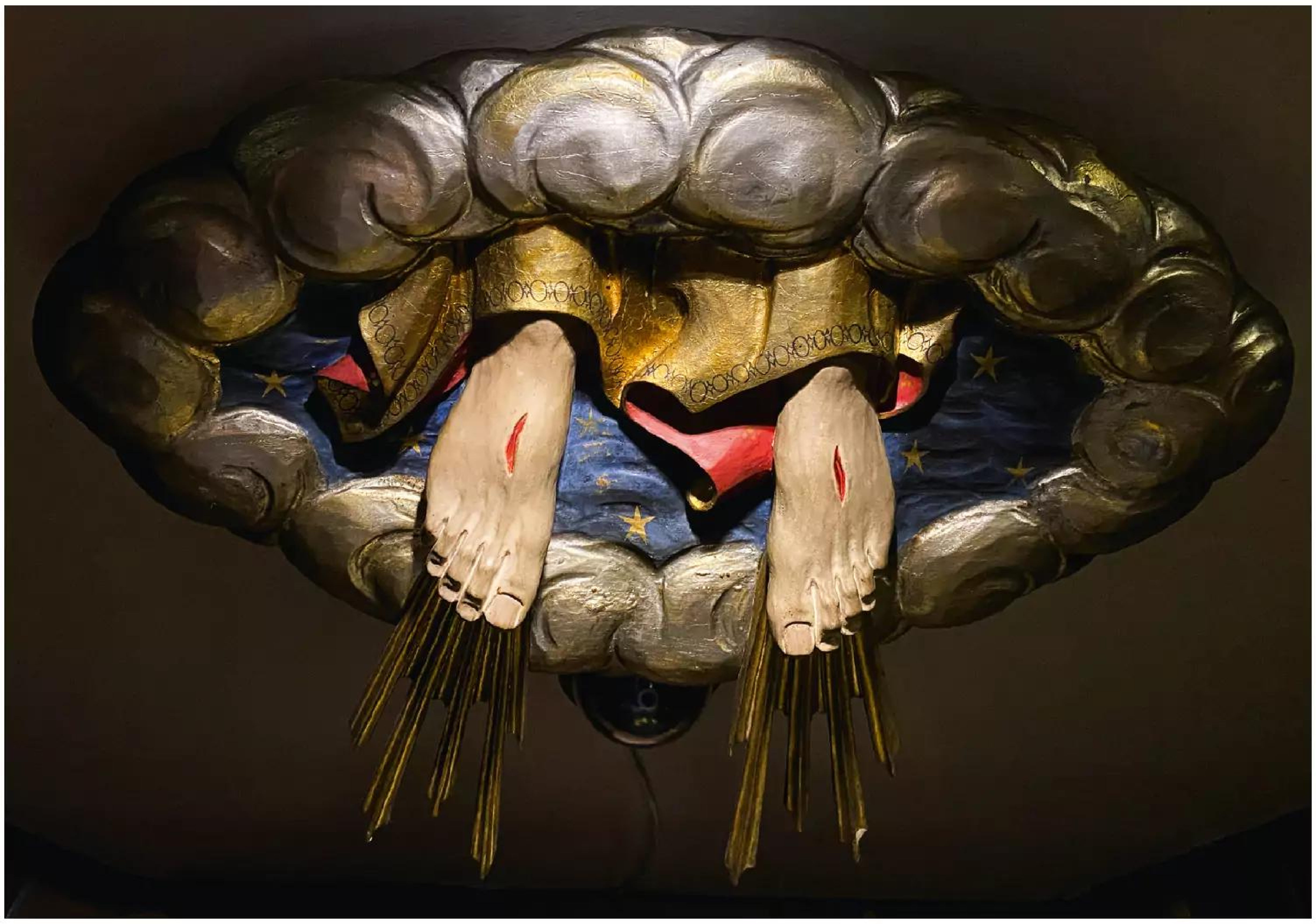
Previous page photo: courtesy David Zwirner; © Ruth Asawa Lanier, Inc.;
This page photo: James Paonessa; courtesy David Zwirner; © Ruth Asawa Lanier, Inc.

AWAY AND UP

The story of Christ's ascension to heaven has provided rich material for artists in the European tradition, drawing our attention to the relationship between faith and the painted image

By Kathryn Murphy

1. *The Ascension of Christ*, 1513, Hans Süss von Kulmbach (*c.* 1485–1522), oil on wood, 61.5 × 38.1cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



2. View of the disappearing feet of Christ in the Chapel of Ascension at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, Norfolk

Approach the Chapel of the Ascension in the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, Norfolk, and be, initially, baffled. The space doesn't obviously refer to the liturgical feast to which it is dedicated, celebrating the moment when, 40 days after Easter, the resurrected Jesus ascended before the eyes of his disciples and was received into heaven. A dark picture of the Madonna and Child hangs above the altar; pious, certainly, but only obliquely relevant. But follow the wavering lines of the wood panelling upwards and the eye discovers a pair of feet extruding from the ceiling, shedding rays like the fire of rocket-boosters, disappearing into a narrow patch of star-spangled blue enclosed by ruffles of silver cloud (Fig. 2). It is ridiculous: not just the kitschy naivety of the carving, but its simultaneous literalism and unreality. The biblical narrative occurs outdoors. The sculpture asks us not just to imagine Jesus's aeronautics, but to make of the ceiling a sky, without any of the *trompe-l'oeil* that transforms baroque vaulting into an infinitely receding heaven. In Walsingham, the ceiling is a blank, interrupted by an incongruous portal: intended not to deceive but to surprise the eye.

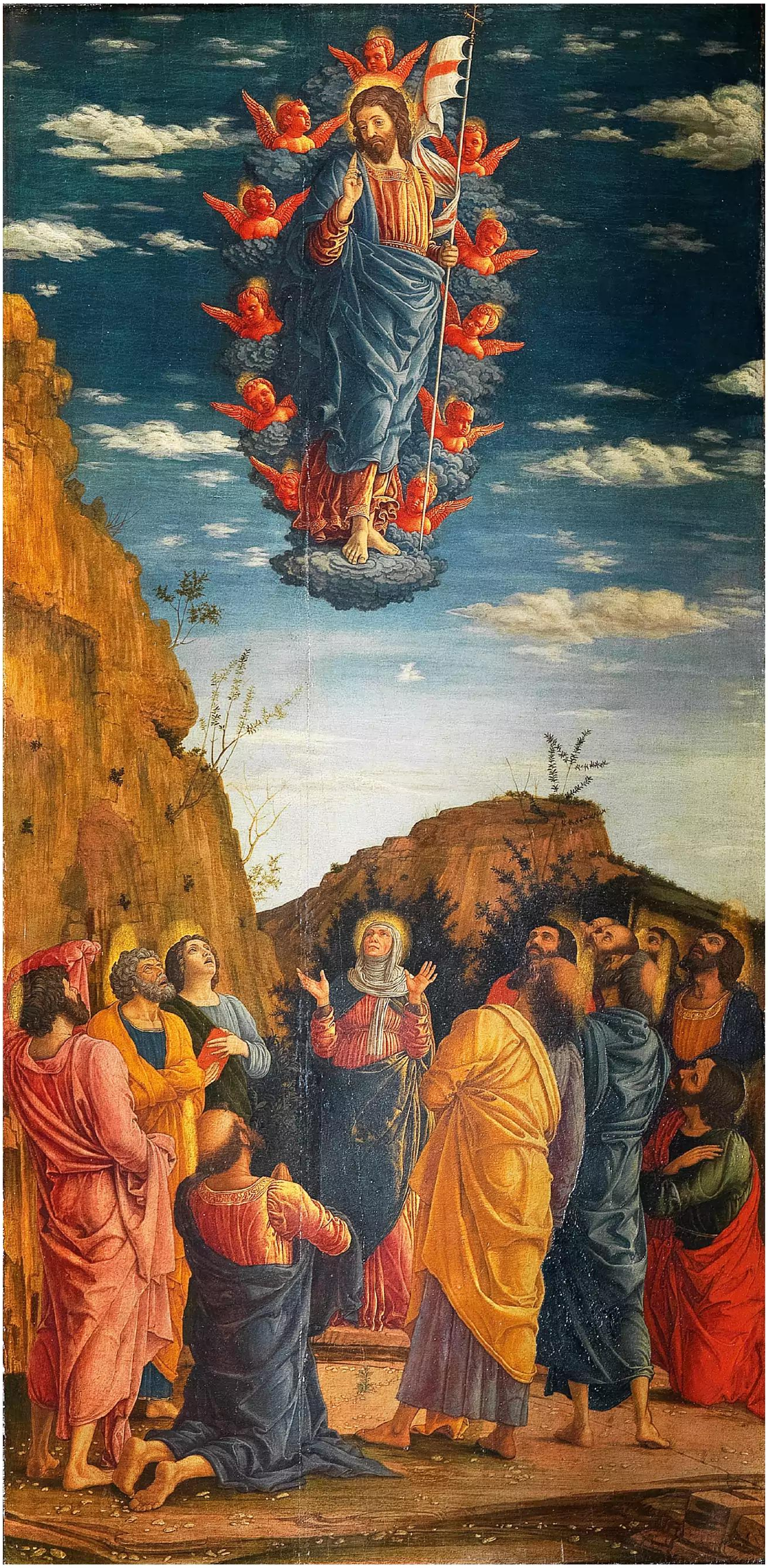
Not knowing where to look is part of the Ascension story, told at most length in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, the fifth book of the New Testament, which begins where the historical life of Jesus ends. Jesus, assembled with his apostles at the Mount of Olives, tells them to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit, after which they should spread his teachings and news of his resurrection. He then abruptly departs: 'while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight'. The disciples are amazed: their beloved friend and teacher, recently recouped from death, has left them again, this time in a baffling feat of vertical take-off. Even after he was occluded by the cloud, the passage states, 'they looked stedfastly toward heaven'. Two angels in white suddenly appear, however, and ask 'Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?', where Jesus is no longer visible, before telling them that he will come again, descending the same way he went up. In the meantime, they will have to wait; their attention is redirected to the world.

Kierkegaard wrote that the Ascension 'goes against all the laws of nature': no wonder the apostles stood around gazing. For Saint Augustine, who preached multiple sermons on the feast, its implausibility was an opportunity for proof of faith. 'Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed,' says Jesus in the gospel of John; imagining the Ascension is a way to court that blessing. In marking the transition from a trust in the person of Jesus, encountered in his incarnate and historical body, to belief reached through the transmission of stories, depictions of the Ascension must simultaneously make the wondrous believable, and emphasise its outlandishness, challenging the viewer to believe in spite of what they know.

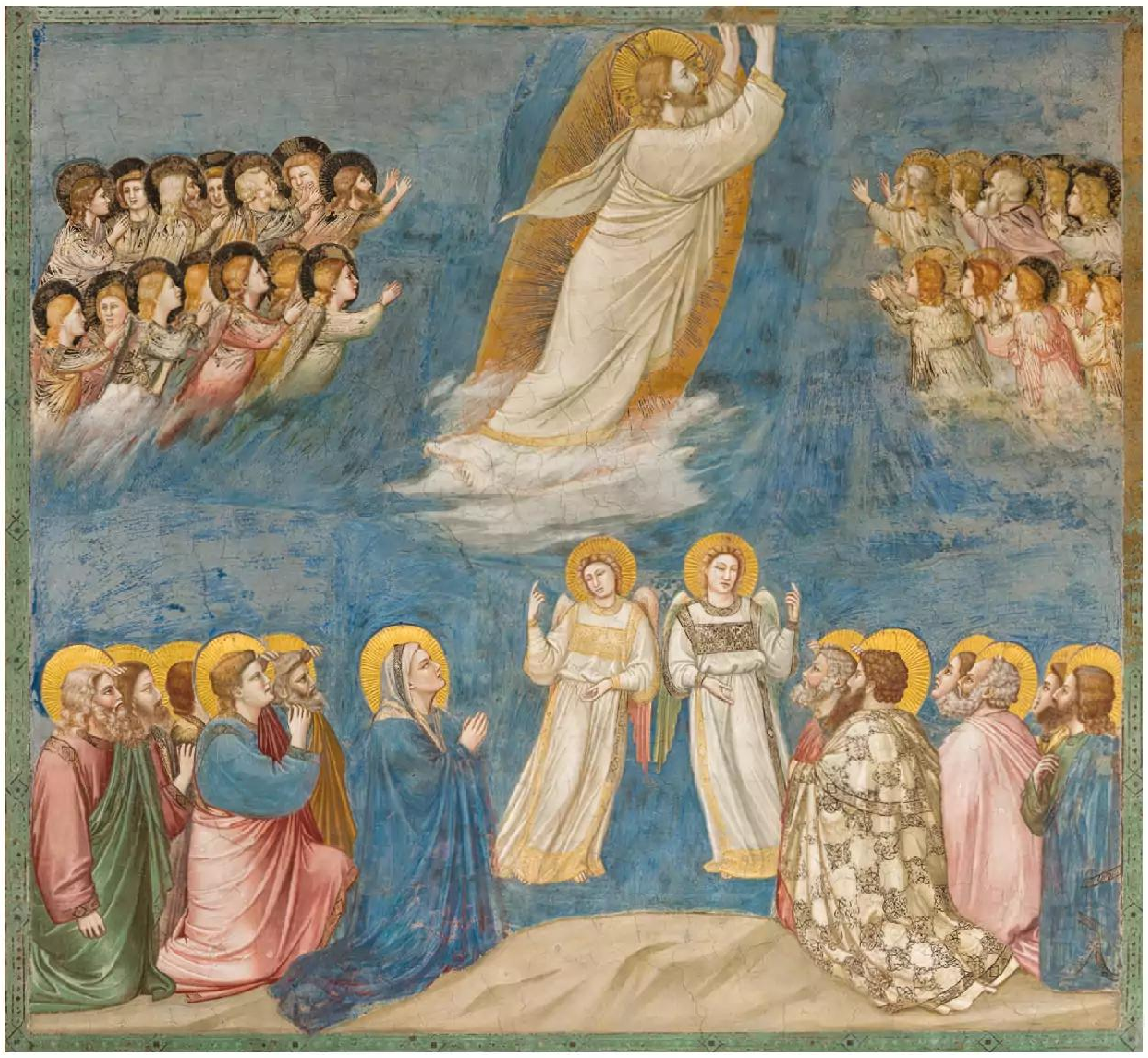
As a result, the clumsiness of the feet retreating into the Walsingham ceiling is part of the point. They recall a medieval Central European tradition in which, at the Feast of the Ascension, a wooden statue of Jesus would be hauled up through a hole in a church's vaulting. The literalism of the ritual reenactment rubs up against its inadequacy as representation. No doubt there was creaking of ropes and pulleys, the figure swaying in its rise, obvious effort. There was also danger: Hans-Ruedi Weber's catalogue of evidence for the medieval practice lists several accidents, including an occasion on 21 May 1433 when Ulrich III, Provost of the Augustinian cloister at Bernried on the Starnberger See, died when the rope with which he raised the statue snapped, and the previously ascending Jesus fell on him.

Such flagrant breaches of verisimilitude, however, emphasise the Ascension's challenge to depiction. The passage in Acts records both amazed looking, and not

Photo: Caroline Ward, the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, Norfolk



3. *Ascension of Christ*, 1460–65, Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), tempera on wood, 86 × 43cm. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence



4. Panel from the Arena Chapel fresco in Padua showing the Ascension (*c.* 1305) by Giotto (1267–75 [?]–1337), Musei Civici di Padova

seeing. For 40 days, the resurrected Jesus had walked the earth with his disciples, broken bread with them, made himself available to be prodded by their sceptical fingers checking his wounds for evidence that this really was his body. With the Ascension, physical companionship ends. Augustine argued that the abstraction of his natural body from everyday experience, despite the apparent loss, enables the perception of Christ's divinity by the eye of the mind. The Ascension, then, is a fulcrum of transition: not just from world into heaven, but from a regime of visibility to a conjuring of presence out of absence.

Images of the Ascension thus face the paradox of depicting imminent invisibility. They stratify the scene, dividing the image into horizontal bands: the ascending Jesus in the upper register, the lower occupied by a cluster of amazed disciples, usually with Jesus's mother Mary, though she is not mentioned in biblical accounts of the scene. In giving us distinct things to look at, this enacts the Ascension's central dilemma of where to look. In Mantegna's Ascension panel (1460–65; Fig. 3), painted for the Gonzaga chapel and now in the Uffizi, the disciples and Mary cluster round a blank patch of ground. Peter and John, to the left of Mary as we look at the painting, stare up in slack-jawed amazement. The painting's situation, probably originally mounted slightly above the viewer's eyeline, mean that we, too, are forced to look up to find Jesus in a mandorla of red putti and grey-blue cloud. He is already removed from the realist depiction of the disciples into the realm of icon. The gap between the disciples' upturned faces and the receding soles of Jesus's feet is a widening fissure that opens between humanity and the sensory experience of God on earth.

Mantegna's rendering descends from one of two strains of early medieval iconography, an eastern tradition in which Jesus is depicted frontally on a mandorla. In the other, deriving from Hellenistic sculpture and more common in Western Europe, Christ is shown in profile. This is echoed in Giotto's fresco in the Arena Chapel, Padua, the penultimate scene of the sequence of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, completed in *c.* 1305 (Fig. 4). In the lower register, Mary and the apostles kneel in wonder, on either side of the hillock from which Jesus has ascended, his feet shrouded in the cloud which obscures the disciples' vision. Their contact with the ground contrasts with the ushering assembly of angels, diminutive though animated figures whose lower bodies dissolve into the distinctive undifferentiated and implacable blue of the sky. Describing Giotto's Lamentation, T.J. Clark called that sky, separating the grieving human figures from the stricken angels, an 'impassable blue trench'. In the Ascension, that gulf has been passed: Jesus broaches the impermeable separation between heaven and earth with his body, opening a mode of passage along which, eventually, humans might hope to follow.

The two figures in white, hovering above the ground, concentrate in their postures the Ascension's dilemmas of attention. Each extends one hand, palm-open, to the apostles and Mary, a signal that they are speaking: evidently asking 'why stand ye gazing up to heaven?'. But if the question is meant to redirect the apostles to their duties of this-worldly evangelism, the angels' other hands contradict that intent, pointing upward at the ascending figure. Hands are everywhere in the painting, at least 33 of them – praying, pointing, praising, and, in a repeated uncanny detail, emerging from behind the disciples' foreheads, as they shade their eyes in looking up. But Jesus's own hands are partially obscured, his fingers reaching beyond the rim

Photo: © Scripta Maneant

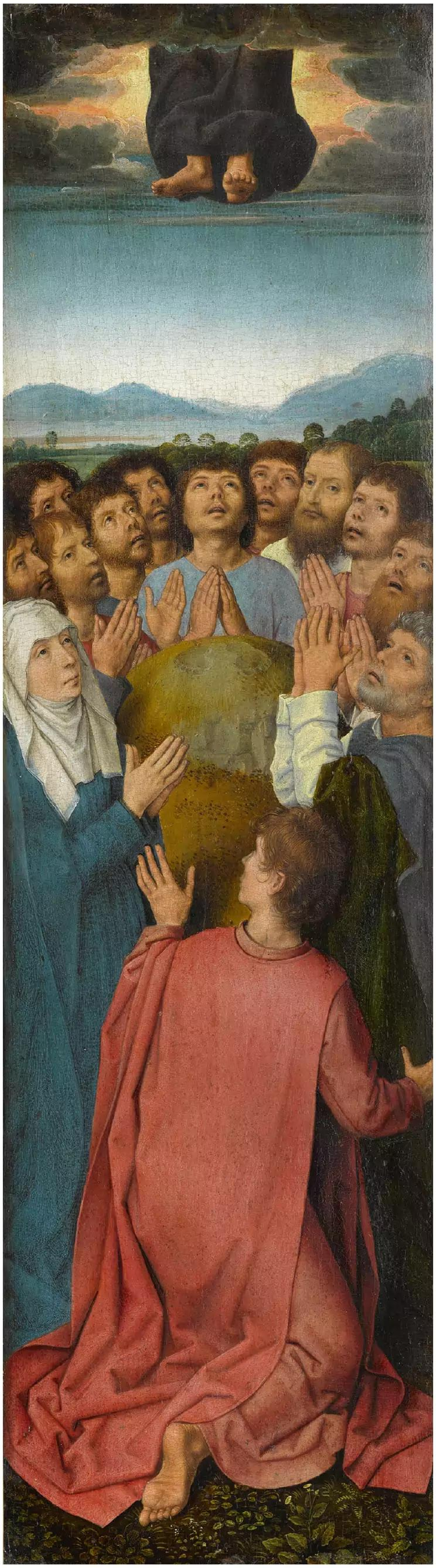
of the fresco's rectangle, a form which Clark describes as 'uniquely electric within its enclosing limits', representing 'the limit of the world'. In the Ascension, however, Jesus crosses that bar. The upper rim of the picture becomes a metaphysical limit made newly permeable.

This transgression of the image's upper edge is characteristic of the third iconographic tradition of the Ascension, to which the ceiling in Walsingham's chapel belongs: what Meyer Schapiro dubbed, in 1943, the 'Disappearing Christ' motif. In these depictions, which originated in English manuscript illumination in the late tenth century, Jesus has all but departed, only his feet and lower legs remaining within the zone of depiction. The motif lends itself to tall and narrow frames, like stained glass windows, or like Memling's lovely version on the right-hand wing of his altarpiece *Triptych of the Resurrection* (*c.* 1490; Fig. 5), now in the Louvre.

Art critics have accounted variously for the emergence and popularity of the disappearing feet. For Schapiro, it was attributable to an increasing taste for realism, and for imagining biblical scenes as if from the perspective of the onlookers. The motif met a feeling that 'disappearance [...] had to be materialised'. For Robert Deshman, in an article of 1997, it was a desire for 'literal word illustration': the text says that, as the disciples watched, the cloud received Jesus 'out of their sight', and so it must be shown.

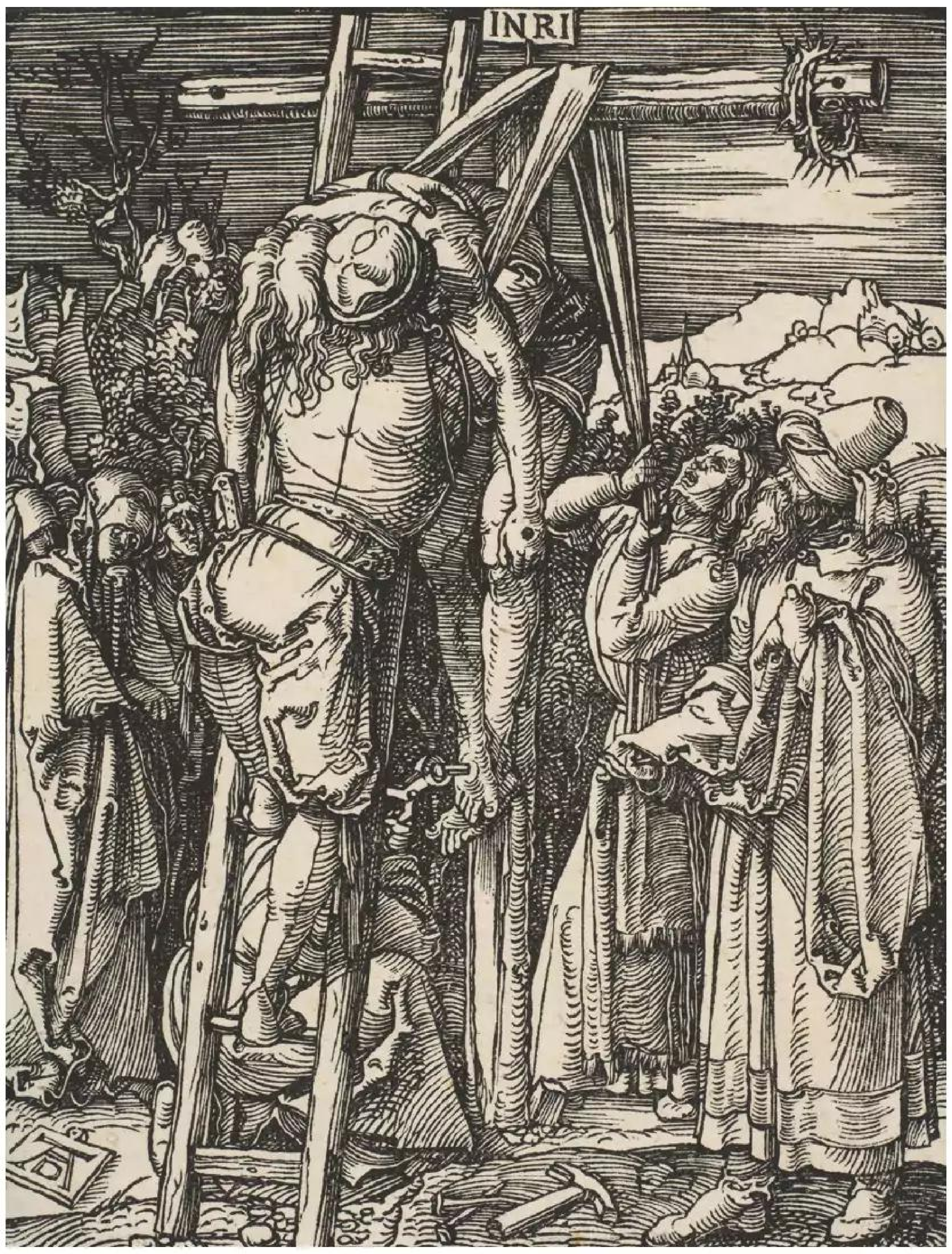
Certainly, medieval and Renaissance depictions of the Ascension encourage the viewer to identify with Mary and the disciples as proxy witnesses, marvelling with them as Jesus disappears. But early images do not attempt to show us the Ascension from their point of view. Wonder is the main subject: in Hans Süss von Kulmbach's *Ascension* (1513; Fig. 1), the clustered apostles and Mary take up three-quarters of the painted surface, the retreating feet, meanwhile, though the focus of their awestruck attention, a mere detail in terms of compositional volume. We see the whole scene frontally, not the perspective of the marvelling men of Galilee, looking up from the ground at the soles of Jesus's feet, with all the foreshortening that would entail – even if Kulmbach, in the exaggerated flex of Jesus's right foot, enables the viewer to see his wounds. Later painters give it a go: Rubens's painting of the Ascension for the ceiling of the Jesuit church in Antwerp (*c.* 1620; Fig. 8) offers a confusion of baffled cloth and extended limbs, while Salvador Dalí, in a queasy painting from 1958, centres Jesus's bare feet, his body receding behind them as he makes his way towards a golden daisy-eye vision of heaven.

In the earlier period, it is not an Ascension, but a Lamentation which gives us this perspective. Mantegna's *Cristo in scurto*, his 'foreshortened Christ' (*c.* 1480), now in the Brera, Milan, is the opposite of the Ascension: its dead, dark alternate. Laid out on the marble anointing slab, Jesus recedes. His pierced feet hang over the edge of the block, their soles towards us. The body is leached of colour, almost grisaille; the variegation and veining of the pink marble on which he lies make stone warmer and livelier than the corpse. The faces of the mourning Maries and John the Baptist, crammed into the upper left of the image, seem oddly like an afterthought. That the viewer's perspective is orthogonal to that of the mourners, and the strange heights involved (are the mourners kneeling, while we stand looking down?), all contribute to an unsettling of viewpoint. But the radical strangeness of the angle anticipates the

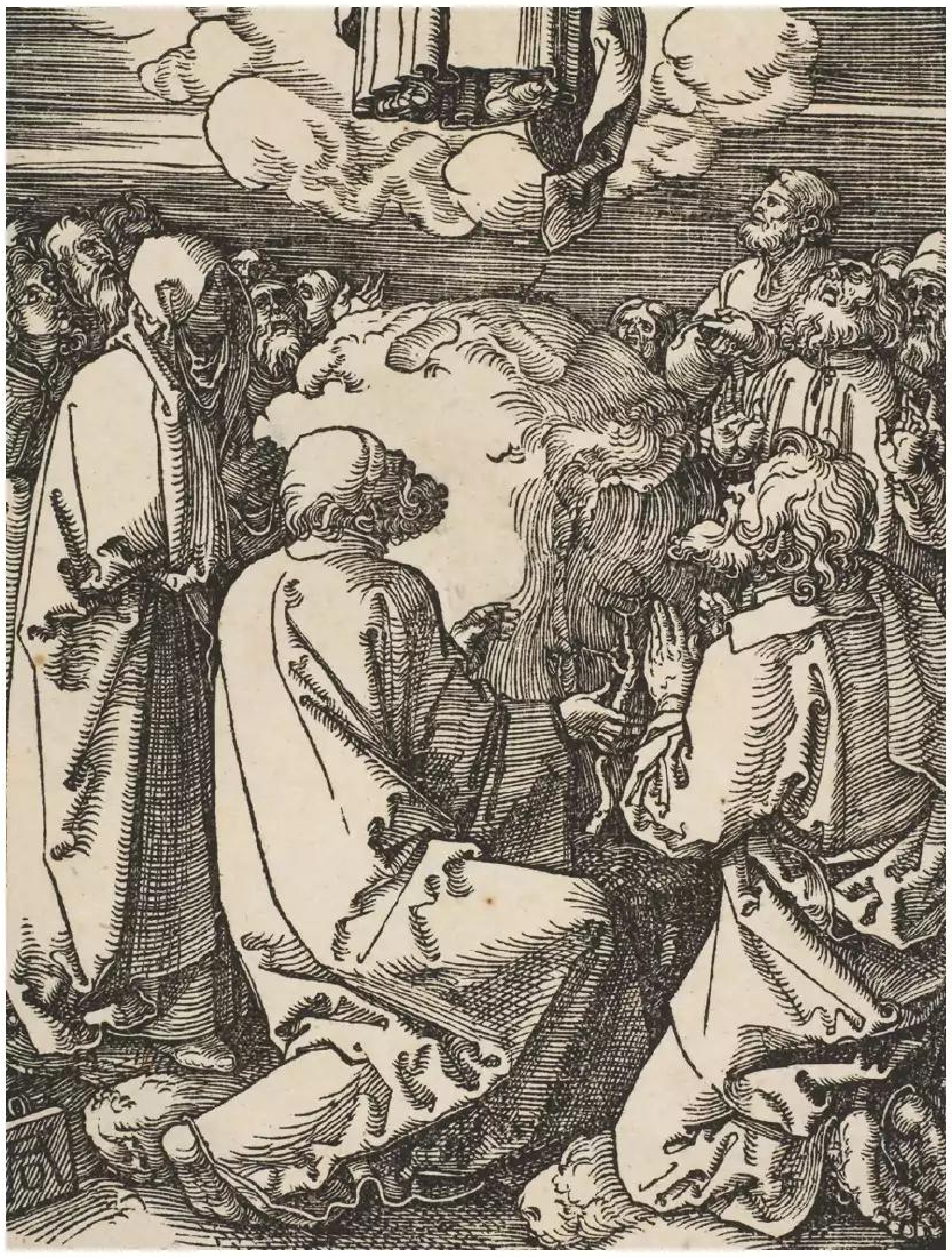


5. Panel from *Triptych of the Resurrection*, *c.* 1490, Hans Memling (1430/40–94), oil on wood, 61.5 × 44.5cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris

Photo: Stéphane Maréchalle/RMN-Grand Palais/Dist. Photo SCALA, Florence



6. Deposition scene from the *Small Passion*, 1511, Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), woodcut, 12.7 × 9.7cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



7. Ascension scene from the *Small Passion*, 1511, Albrecht Dürer, woodcut, 12.7 × 9.8cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

disciples' view of the Ascension, seeing the underside of his wounded feet from below, his body receding behind them. Here, instead of billowing clouds, is ruffled cloth; instead of amazement, tears. But Mantegna's foreshortened Christ also foreshortens the story of the Passion and Resurrection, as the lowest point of the story anticipates its climax.

The Ascension is rarely depicted apart from other scenes of the life of Christ, and its pictorial significance emerges from its place in that sequence of images of his body. In crucifixions, depositions, lamentations, and entombments, that body's inert heft is emphasised. Jesus hangs on the cross, a downward sag of flesh giving up its animating ghost. Dürer's Deposition, from the *Small Passion* (1511; Fig. 6), thinks unusually hard about the mechanics of lowering Christ from the cross: behind the ladder, someone kneels with pliers to extract the nail pinning his feet to the cross; meanwhile John the Baptist and a figure on the ladder collaborate, via an improvised fabric pulley, to let the body's dead weight gently down. The tautness of the cloth is in absolute contrast to the slack and heavy cadaver. The body of Christ, corpus now corpse, has become a matter of logistics, a negotiation with gravity and the grave.

Dürer's Ascension later in the sequence shows, in contrast, an unborne lightness of being. The body's terrible dependency in the Deposition is countered in this woodcut, in which Jesus has just blasted off, leaving only his footprints as token of his embodied presence (Fig. 7). Shira Brisman has beautifully read these prints as an endorsement of Dürer's own print-making practice, in which the 'transfer of image to paper [...] mirrors the touch by which Christ leaves his impression on the human world'.

This is also a theological point. After the Ascension, Jesus, not being bodily in any particular place, is potentially present in every or any place; not just to his particular friends and disciples, but to all humankind. In Catholic theology, every iteration of the mass makes his body present and perceptible again, in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. In Walsingham, the answer to the angels' question 'why stand ye looking up?' is obvious: because there are feet dangling from the ceiling. But they dangle above the altar: and the angels' redirection of attention invites the believing viewer to recognise that, in the interim before Jesus returns, it is at the altar that his body can be met.

Amy Knight Powell has brilliantly argued that Deposition scenes enact art deposing itself: taking down the image from its venerated place, and burying it for the duration of the Passiontide. The Resurrection performs a return of the image. At the Ascension, however, it is once again removed, this time under its own steam, and up instead of down. For Powell, the Ascension therefore marks a 'path from the visible to the invisible', a 'one-way street' in which the viewer is moved towards a 'final imageless destination'.

But this ignores the angels' admonition. The viewer of an Ascension painting doesn't need their injunction to cease gazing up to heaven: they are already looking at a picture. Rather than suggesting that we cease to look at all, Ascension images suggest the opposite: that, the body of Christ having departed this earth, until he comes again what's left are actions of resummoning – as in the mass – or reenvisioning, the making and contemplation of substitutionary images, ersatzes for the absent real thing. The festive reenactments of medieval churches, the comic levitations in prints and paintings, the silliness of the Walsingham feet, in their literalism and flagrant implausibility, make that ersatzness into their whole point.

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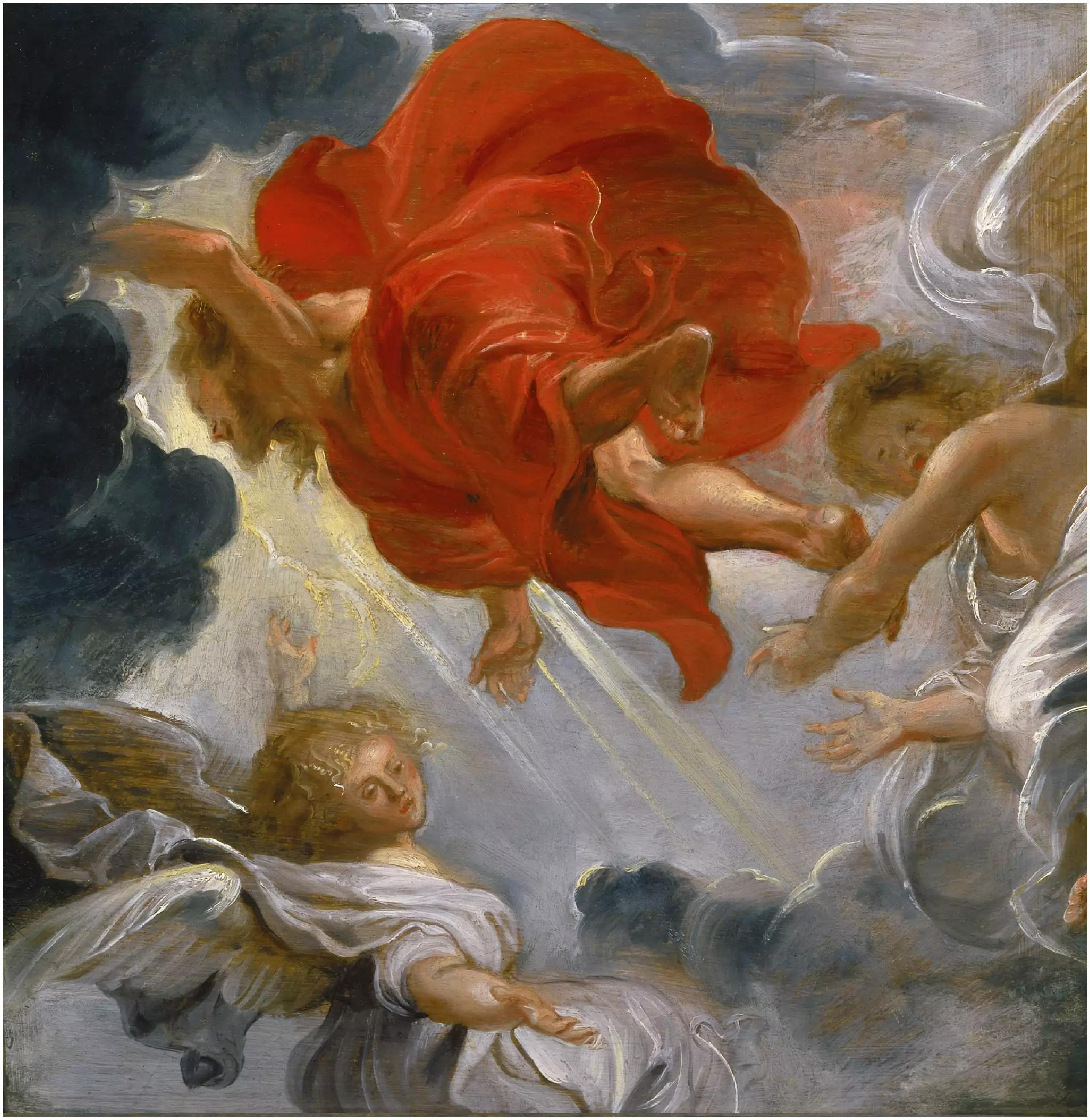


8. *The Ascension*, *c.* 1620, Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), oil on panel, 33 × 31.5cm. Fine Art Academy of Vienna

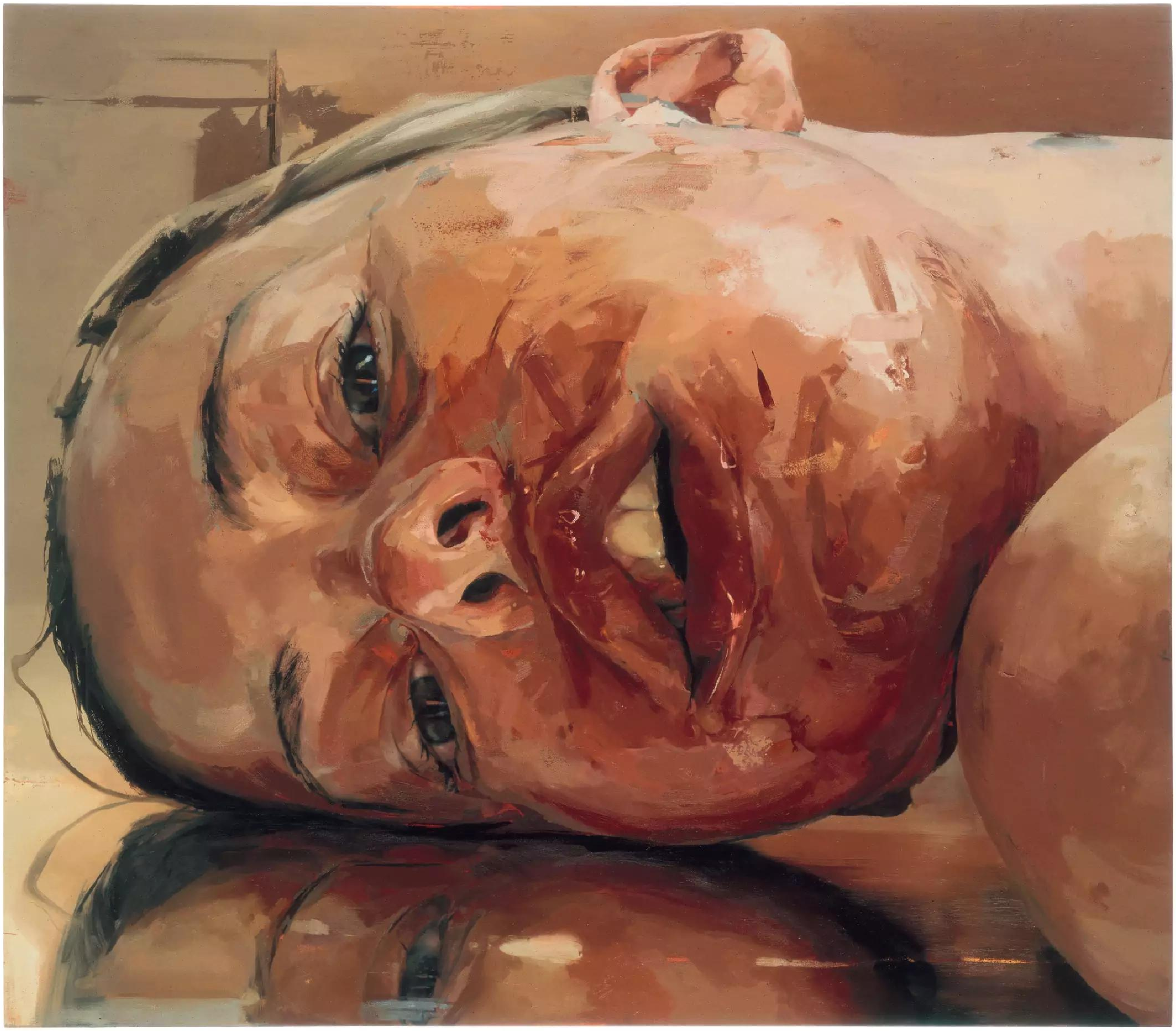
Courtesy Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien/Academy of Fine Arts Vienna Paintings Gallery

FACE TO FACE

Jenny Saville's *Reverse* is typical of the way the artist pushes figurative painting into abstraction. Ahead of a major UK show, Sarah Howgate of the National Portrait Gallery explains what makes the image so striking

Courtesy Gagosian; © Jenny Saville; all rights reserved, DACS 2025

1. Detail from Jenny Saville's *Reverse* (2002–03), with the shine of the subject's eyes showing the painter's command of brushwork



2. *Reverse*, 2002–03, Jenny Saville (b. 1970), oil on canvas, 213 × 244cm. Private collection

Courtesy Gagosian; © Jenny Saville; all rights reserved, DACS 2025

Jenny Saville's *Reverse* (2002–03; Fig. 2) is based on her own face, but it's no self-portrait. She may have used herself as a model and a reference, but as in so much of her work, she has distorted herself beyond easy recognition. What we're seeing is not simply a head but a condition – a 'neurosis', as she's put it; something under the skin.

What's fascinating about this is that while it is clearly true – the shine of her eyes, her parted lips and her plaintive yet defiant expression convey a well of repressed feeling – the skin is the first thing we notice. Saville had been spending time watching a cosmetic surgeon at work, moulding and sculpting faces; that might explain the sculptural, three-dimensional nature of *Reverse*, in which the artist pushes paint until it becomes flesh.

She pushes it so far, in fact, that her figuration slips into abstraction – particularly when you get up close to the brushwork on this two-metre-wide canvas, the scale at which she preferred to paint at this point in her career. This slippage between modes is core to Saville's practice. It's ironic that her first major institutional show in the UK is taking place at the National Portrait Gallery (20 June –7 September), since she's always been resistant to the idea of her paintings being self-portraits, or even portraits of any kind. She tends to talk about them as portraits of painting. They're less about the people than they are about the paint and the act of painting itself.

In this sense, Saville might be considered a conceptual artist. She rose to prominence among the Young British Artists (YBAs); five of her paintings were included in the notorious 'Sensation' exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1997, in which a number of bracing conceptual works, drawn from the collection of Charles Saatchi, drew 300,000 visitors and howls of outrage from the British media. As with the YBAs, controversy followed her work for a time: one of her *Stare* paintings (2004–05), for instance, was used by Manic Street Preachers as the cover of their album *Journal for Plague Lovers* (2009); some supermarkets stocked the album in a plain slipcase because it was considered a violent image. (In fact, it was based on an image of a boy with a birthmark that she'd found in a medical textbook.)

But her insistence on painting, particularly figurative painting, set her apart from many other YBAs, which in any case was little more than a media label. Her reference points were unglamorous: she had been inspired to enrol at the Glasgow School of Art by the group of figurative painters that were there shortly before her – the New Glasgow Boys, Steven Campbell, Ken Currie, Peter Howson and Adrian Wiszniewski. She was also under the influence of the School of London, particularly Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud and Frank Auerbach. The attention she paid to these artists was nothing short of forensic: she pored over their drawing, brushwork and the kind of paint they used. She was fascinated by Auerbach's obsessiveness – the models that he would return to over and over and the way he would remove all the paint from a painting and start again the next day, repeatedly building it up and scraping it away. And the violence of Bacon's work – his idea of humans as animals, their bodies bursting out of the frame – left a clear trace on works such as *Reverse*. It's fascinating to compare *Reverse* with *Suspension*, which Saville painted around the same time: their palette and composition are remarkably similar, but one is a human face and the other is a bloody porcine mass.

Some of her other reference points were even more unfashionable than modern figurative painters. As a teenager, she had spent time in Venice soaking up the influence of Titian, Rubens and Rembrandt. She had looked deeply at Rubens's sketches, his fine details and his brushwork; she'd studied Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin* (1516–18) at the Frari. (These interests were not fleeting; in 2015 she curated a show at the Royal Academy about Rubens's legacy and, in 2022, when Titian's *Assumption* was being restored, she climbed up the scaffolding to look at it up close.) Around the time she painted *Reverse*, she was living mostly in Palermo, looking at the Old Masters.

Saville's insistence on painting set her apart from many other YBAs

But Saville had no interest in imitation; she didn't so much copy her progenitors as draw on their energy. Where the New Glasgow Boys had used the life room at the Glasgow School, Saville chose not to work from life; she made photography her primary source and has continued to paint from photos throughout her career. She would take hundreds of shots, not only of herself or other people but all sorts of things: road markings, signs, graffiti. She's always been a scavenger of images and working from photographs allowed her to be bold and unexpected in her compositions. *Reverse* is a perfect example. With its strange orientation, its subject's face pressed up against a floor, it could only have been made from a photograph – there's no way she could have done it while looking in the mirror.

There is a reflective surface in *Reverse*, however. Saville had also used a mirror to make *Propped* (1992), one of the most distorted works she's ever based on her own body, which she had shown to immediate acclaim at the

Glasgow School of Art. A reflection of text written by the French language theorist and feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray shimmers faintly over the central figure. In *Reverse* she uses the mirror in a different way. It may have been informed by the work she had done in the mid ’90s with the fashion photographer Glen Luchford, who took shots of her face squashed against plates, glass and other surfaces. All self-portraits are reflections in a sense; Freud made a whole range of self-portraits that he called *Reflection*. But Saville incorporates the reflection into the painting. This gives *Reverse* a certain dynamism – as does the painting’s unusual orientation, which speaks to her longstanding interest in inversion, on occasion turning her canvas upside down to work on. There’s a physicality to her work, and a performative aspect; in *Reverse*, this comes not just from the brushstrokes but from her contact with the floor. Though she didn’t necessarily paint it while on the floor herself, she had intermittently been painting on the floor as early as 1999, when she made *Hyphen* – her well-known painting of two heads, based on her own and her sister’s, that appear almost to belong to a single person – partly using this technique. Willem de Kooning, a major influence on Saville, often worked on the floor, mining its possibilities for a different kind of mark-making.

The impression of vividness and energy is heightened by the painting’s colour scheme. Her early nudes are characterised by cool palettes and, though *Reverse* wasn’t her first painting to use warmer tones – *Figure 11.23* (1996–97), for example, is similar in palette – it feels particularly ‘hot’. (One critic pointed out that it looked as though she were painting with bodily fluids.) She made the painting for an exhibition she called ‘Migrants’, which opened at Gagosian in New York in 2003. Her first solo show at the gallery, ‘Territories’ in 1999, had been more concerned with representing her own body; ‘Migrants’ marked a move to a broader range of imagery. The trauma and violence of the news media, with all its death, disease, deformity and bodily horror, began to bleed into her work.

The show comprised six canvases, including *Reverse*. The art historian Linda Nochlin wrote the catalogue, describing Saville as ‘the most interesting and exciting painter of our times’ – which gives a sense of Saville’s stature in the art world even then. As classical or old-fashioned as her references were, it was her choice of themes and her post-painterly treatment of them that won her consistent acclaim. Her interest in depicting psychic and physical damage struck a chord in the wake of 9/11, but the way she captured this varied in intriguing ways: compare *Reverse* with *Pause*, which she made in the same year, also for ‘Migrants’, and based on a newspaper image of a woman staggering away from a bomb blast, her clothes torn from her body.

Reverse is more ambiguous. It’s sumptuous and in some ways seductive and beautiful, but also willing to undercut or even attack its own beauty. It’s sexually provocative, with the pouting lips and the glistening teeth, and almost overblown – but also very still, reflective in both senses of the word. One of her recent works, *Tilt* (2024), seems to revisit the orientation, composition and colours of *Reverse*; perhaps this is an indicator of the painting’s troubling power.

All great artists have their lasting images. *Reverse*, along with *Propped*, is the painting that inspired Saatchi to acquire as much of her work as possible in the first place. There’s something about how her use of paint evokes Rubens and Bacon and Freud all at once while channelling her own remarkable sensibilities. It is grotesque and it is sublime; it is painting as an act of pure energy.

> It is grotesque and sublime
> – painting as pure energy

This only really comes across in an exhibition context; reproductions in catalogues or on screens can never convey that sort of dynamism. So it’s extraordinary that the show at the National Portrait Gallery is her first major museum exhibition in the UK. Saville has influenced a wide range of creative figures, from painters such as Nathaniel Mary Quinn to the novelist and former fashion designer Douglas Stuart, who has cited Saville’s graduate show as a significant moment in his own artistic development. She has been more feted in Italy: in 2021 her work was exhibited in five venues around Florence, with her drawing *Pietà I* (2019–21) shown alongside Michelangelo’s *Deposition* (1547–55) in the Duomo. Her mastery of bodies is similar in some ways to his – that ability to twist, contort and combine cruelty and mercy. She has that rare dual gift: the eye of an art historian and the verve of a great artist.

As told to Arjun Sajip.

Sarah Howgate is senior curator of contemporary collections at the National Portrait Gallery in London.

‘Jenny Saville: The Anatomy of Painting’ is at the National Portrait Gallery, London, from 20 June–7 September. (npg.org.uk).

Courtesy Gagosian; © Jenny Saville; all rights reserved, DACS 2025

3. The pouting lips and glistening teeth give the painting a sexually provocative aspect

1. Charles Gordon-Lennox, 11th Duke of Richmond, photographed in the grounds of the Goodwood Art Foundation, Chichester, in April 2025

COUNTRY LIFE

Perhaps better known for horse racing and motorsports, Goodwood is now home to a new art foundation. The Sussex estate's owner, the Duke of Richmond, explains his ambitions for the project

By Susan Moore

Portrait by Adam Firman

Goodwood's new Art Foundation is nothing if not ambitious. Its catalyst was in part the closure in 2020 of the Cass Sculpture Foundation, a charity which had for nearly 30 years rented 26 acres of this historic Sussex estate for the commissioning and display of contemporary British sculpture. But it has also been a long-held desire of the current Duke of Richmond to set up a major not-for-profit at Goodwood and, as he told me a few weeks before the foundation's opening, to 'do something with contemporary art'.

This may come as a surprise to those who know Goodwood for its horse racing and motorsports, and the Duke as the founder of the hugely successful Festival of Speed and the Goodwood Revival. Yet Charles Henry Gordon-Lennox, 11th Duke of Richmond and Gordon, to give him (almost) his full title, is also a respected fine art photographer. As a collector of Surrealist and post-war photography, he has made what he describes as a very modest contribution to the family collection, but he wanted to go further to bring art at Goodwood up to date. Most of the collection at the house belongs to the 17th and 18th centuries – the heyday of the family's fortunes – with paintings commissioned from Canaletto and George Stubbs among the highlights, as well as 18th-century French decorative arts. The remit of the new foundation involves bringing to the estate some of the best contemporary art in the world, in all media.

> The magic – and the potential – of the place is self-evident

Goodwood House remains a family home, although its state rooms are open to the public. As we sit talking in its fine, flower-filled Large Library after a tour of the foundation's grounds, now expanded beyond the original Cass site to embrace an ancient woodland and some 70 acres, the as yet unpainted cement slabs of a monumental Hélio Oiticica installation are being prepared to weather the British climate. *The Invention of Colour: Magic Square #3* (1977–79/2025) will be the first outdoor sculpture by this influential Brazilian artist in Europe. Oiticica made interactive installations called *penetráveis* ('penetrables') throughout the 1960s and '70s – the most famous, *Tropicália*, giving its name to the movement of art, music and Brazilian identity. This brilliantly hued piece, one of three works in his celebrated *Magic Square* series, will lure visitors inside, an invitation to enter and explore a labyrinthine art space.

Rose Wylie's whimsical painted bronze *Pale-Pink Pineapple/Bomb* (2025) had arrived from the foundry the day before my visit and been installed on a sight line leading to the distant shimmering sea. Residing nearby were the interlocking forms of *Octetra (three element stack)* (1968/2021), designed as a play sculpture by Isamu Noguchi. Dame Rachel Whiteread's new and yet-to-be unveiled monumental staircase piece, *Down and Up*, had not yet been delivered. Nor had *Detached II* (2012; Fig. 2), another concrete work cast this time from a humble garden shed. Part of her ongoing series of *Shy Sculptures*, it is to be secluded in the ancient woodland and slowly age, like its original counterpart, to merge into its environment. Destined for a woodland glade is a pair of white-painted bronze slabs reminiscent of tombstones or memorials. For Goodwood's opening exhibition on Whiteread, they will be joined by *Doppelgänger* (2022–21) in the Gallery alongside her outdoor photography, a little-known facet of her work.

Other Turner Prize winners will also take a bow. New sculptures by Montserrat-born British artist Veronica Ryan, *Magnolia Blossoms* and *Magnolia Pod*, refer to Goodwood's newly planted magnolia grove (Fig. 5). A sound sculpture by the Berlin-based Scottish artist Susan Philipsz will be installed in the ancient woodland: four singing voices emerge from the trees in *As Many as Will* (2015), an immersive vocal work whose shifting rhythms, based on 17th-century country dances, bid visitors to join in. In the smaller Piggott Gallery, an expansive film installation by the American artist Amie Siegel, *Bloodlines* (2022), and her print series *Cloudes* (2023) both refer to paintings in Goodwood House by George Stubbs, whose career as a sporting artist and animal painter was launched by the patronage of the 3rd Duke of Richmond.

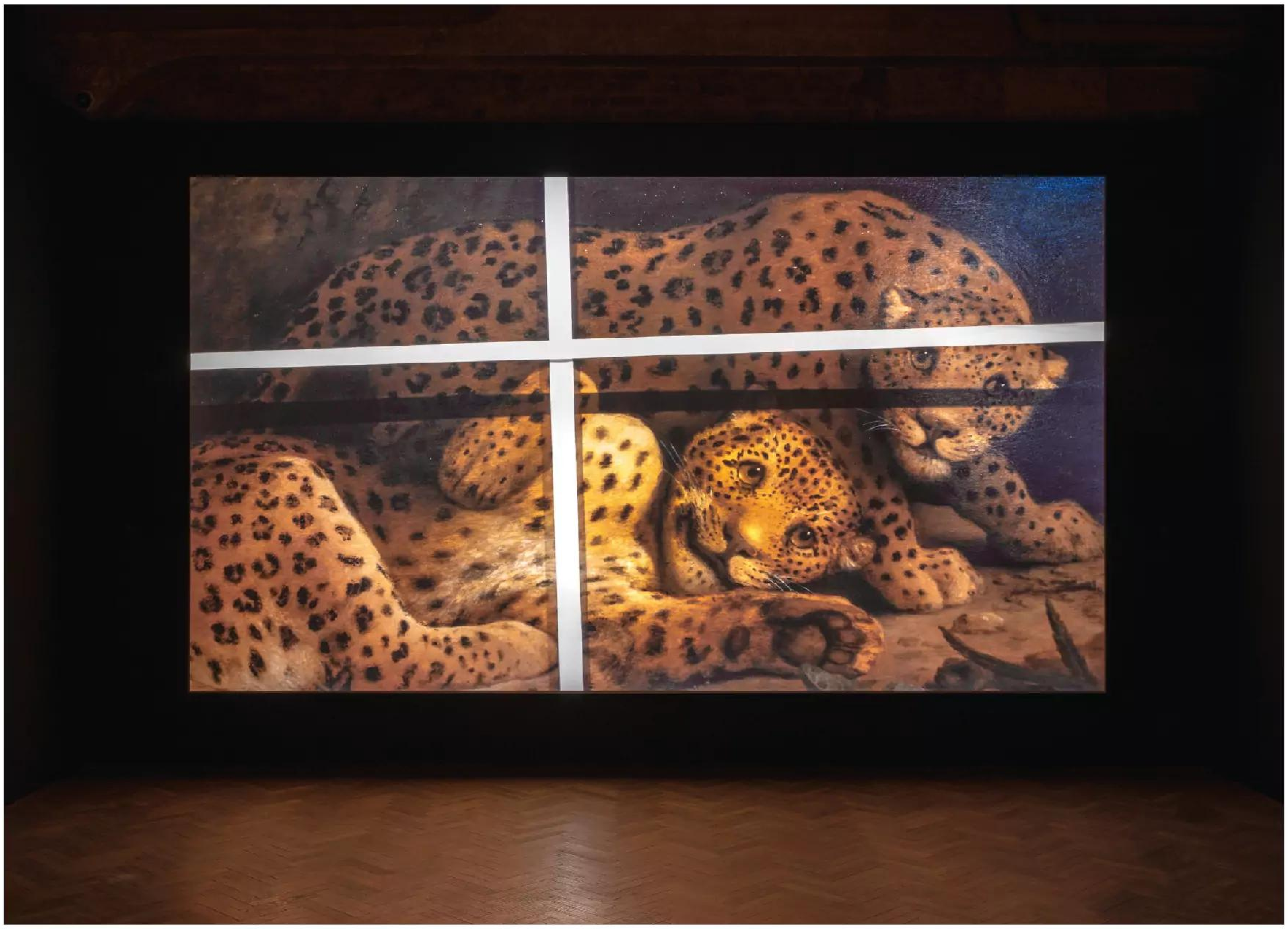
Even without most of the works of art in place, much of the new planting barely established and the site a hive of activity of men and women in high-vis and hard hats, the magic – and the potential – of the place is self-evident. Part of the charm lies in its seclusion, hidden as it is behind a high flint wall built by prisoners held in Portsmouth during the Napoleonic Wars. Almost every long vista down to the distant sea is framed by trees. This particularity is complemented by similarly distinctive programming. Deftly led by the foundation's consultant curator, Ann Gallagher, previously head of the collections of British art at the Tate, it brings together artists of international renown whose work either has a particular affinity with the natural world or is a response to the specific landscape or history of Goodwood. The works themselves are accessible to all. As Richard Grindy, the director of Goodwood Art Foundation, puts it, 'What we really want is to be engaging a public who may otherwise not feel comfortable about visiting a museum in a city, or taking their children where they are not sure how to conduct themselves. We asked ourselves, "How can we make it as easy as possible to engage with some of the best art in the world?"'

Some of these loaned works will remain *in situ* for several years; others will come and go. Each is carefully positioned in a particular but subtly changing natural environment that purposely retains a wild aesthetic – woodland, plantation, wetland and meadow rather than

Photo: Lucy Dawkins; courtesy Goodwood Art Foundation; © Rachel Whiteread

2. *Detached II* (2012), a concrete work by Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963) cast from a garden shed, which is designed to merge into its surroundings over time

3. *Pale-Pink Pineapple/ Bomb* (2025), a painted bronze sculpture by Rose Wylie (b. 1934)



4. *Bloodlines* (2022) a film by Amie Siegel (b. 1974), is on display in Goodwood's Piggott Gallery

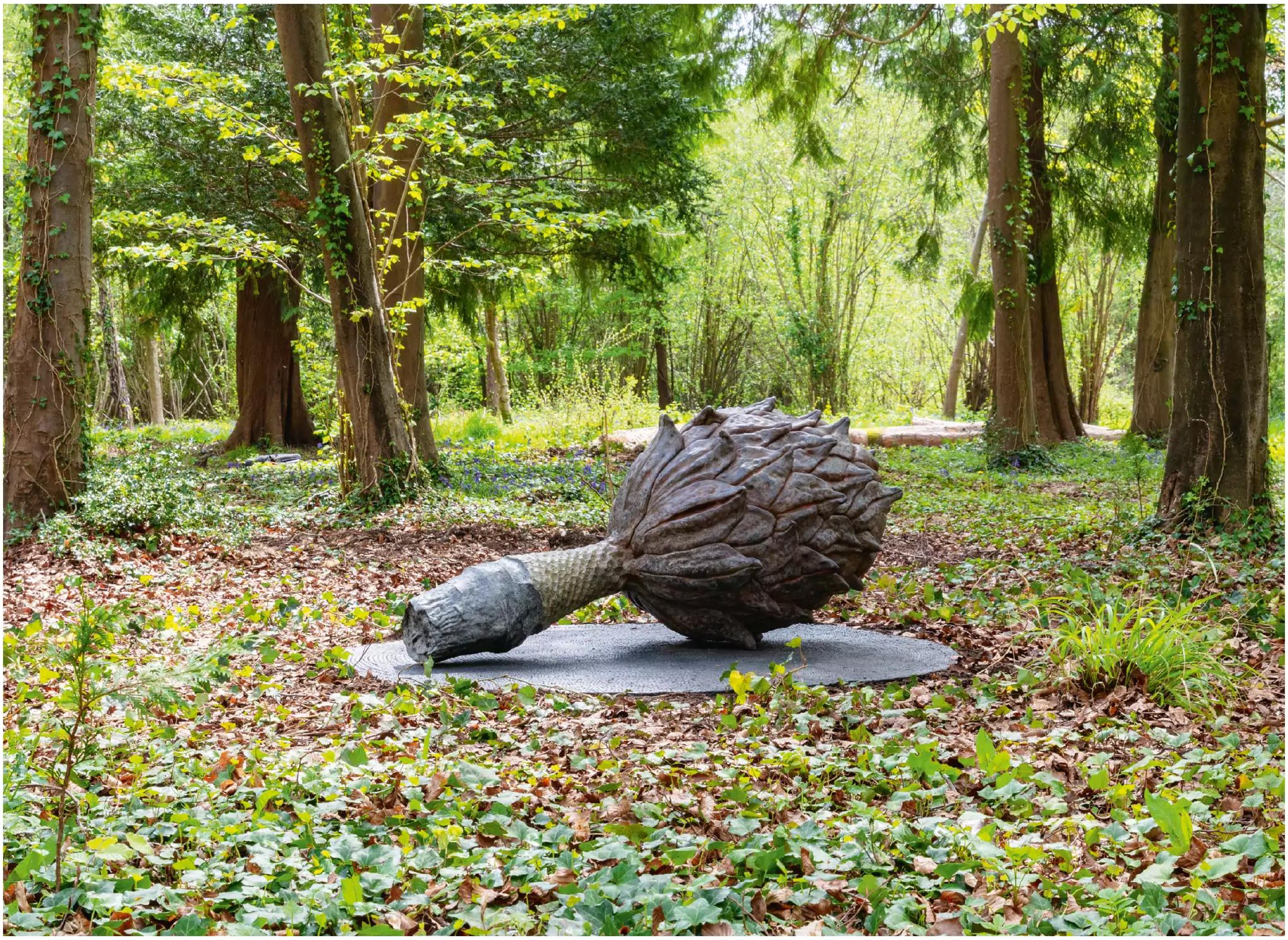
Opposite page photo: Adam Firman; © Rose Wylie; this page photo: Richard Ivey; courtesy the artist/Thomas Dane Gallery; © Amie Siegel

the usual swathes of manicured lawn. Sculpture is not used as costume jewellery. It is there to be discovered, and by the widest of audiences. As the Duke says, 'We want to make a significant addition to the contemporary art world if we can, providing something that people will find exciting and different and a special experience, while at the same time being grass-roots useful to our local community and those who need it the most.' He continues: 'I am a real believer that if you present people with the best in the world – whether they know what the best in the world is or not is irrelevant – there is always an excitement and frisson around it.'

He is also a believer in finding the right people to drive a vision forward and giving them their head. Art, Environment and Education are the three pillars here, all mutually dependent. 'We worked out pretty quickly that we wanted to work with the best in the business, and were lucky we found the team very quickly,' the Duke adds. Grindy, responsible for the business and operational side of the project, came aboard as a consultant seven years ago. Gallagher followed shortly thereafter, as did the horticulturist and landscape designer Dan Pearson. Pearson's intuitive, naturalistic and sustainable approach is recognised for its sensitivity to place, and the success of the interaction between art and environment ultimately depends on this collaboration between artist, curator and designer. Pearson's ingenious planting scheme promises 24 seasonal moments – that, is something new to see or smell – throughout the year (one every two weeks). Each space has its moment of glory. Swathes of snowdrops, hellebores, a bluebell wood, groves of magnolia and cherry, Swedish whitebeam and a katsura grove – where coppery leaves dropping in autumn smell like burning sugar – headline a programme that is designed to encourage return visits. Meandering paths and routes between the works, the two gallery spaces and a new cafe, 24, also provide sanctuaries for rest and contemplation.

A thousand trees and some 100,000 bulbs have been planted. To allow in light for these woodland glades, a couple of hundred trees that were either failing or non-native were felled and repurposed as log-stack walls, wood-chip paths or fuel for the estate's biomass boiler. Hidden among the trees is a giant wigwam, the Learning Hub. The discreet steel, timber and glass visitor gallery built for Wilfred and Jeannette Cass has been refurbished and adapted as the Gallery, while the former archive and library building provides the second exhibition venue. Both buildings were designed by the architect Craig Downie, who has returned to design the striking, asymmetrical cafe with its generous dining terrace projecting into the landscape. Even inside these spaces, the woodland is a constant presence.

This is a bold and costly project, which became bolder and costlier as it unfolded. In launching the foundation, the Duke admits that 'we jumped off the cliff a bit – Goodwood did have to get behind it at the beginning'. Getting behind it included funding and constructing the Oiticica installation, a major logistical challenge, and serious fundraising. Despite the Duke's reputation for working 12-hour days and for meticulousness, it was clear that Goodwood could not fund it all itself:



5. *Untitled (Magnolia Pod)* (2024), a bronze by Veronica Ryan (b. 1956) that chimes with the new magnolia grove at Goodwood

'We employ 700 people here. It is a huge pull on our capital just to keep the place going.' The family and the Goodwood team are old hands at raising money for all kinds of charities. Donors not only stepped up to the plate, but also encouraged the foundation to aim higher. One of those was Stephen A. Schwarzman, co-founder and CEO of the global private equity firm Blackstone, whose foundation has paid for the landscaping. Rolls-Royce, whose headquarters, design, manufacturing and assembly centre is on the Goodwood estate, is sponsoring the Whiteread exhibition and is committed to supporting the foundation's main annual exhibition for three years. Founding patrons have similarly committed to an initial three-year arrangement.

For the Duke, 'the real payback' from the foundation will come from its third pillar: education. In a sense, this programme is building on an established legacy. His father created an education trust in 1976 and set up a small school on the estate to promote awareness and understanding of the natural environment and sustainable agriculture among children and young people, particularly those who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs. Already, around 3,500 children a year visit the organic Home Farm or the Forest School on the estate. To this, the art foundation adds a creative learning programme devised by Sally Bacon, which focuses on personal development and well-being. Transport is free for schools or groups without the resources to pay and there are art backpacks to take away.

For Goodwood's current proprietor, the scheme has a particular resonance. 'We hope it will be useful to people who need it the most – children who are excluded from school, children who would not normally be taken to see art. We hope it may be transformative in some way.' The Duke pauses. 'I was obviously super-fortunate as a child, but I hated every school I went to, pretty much. Only one school, which I went to for two years, introduced me to everything that I am interested in now, and that was because a master who taught photography took some interest and gave me encouragement. You only have to show kids a tiny bit of interest and they blossom.' He continues: 'There is very little art or music on the national curriculum now. Not to get that is shocking. If we get it right at Goodwood, we can have some impact.' Music is part of the programming for open-air events and performances in the amphitheatre, created in a clearing in the woods. A gallery performance space is on the agenda for phase three.

Phase two of the landscape development will focus on greater biodiversity, with a lake and large wildflower meadows under discussion. The Duke sees no conflict in offering the thunder of high-octane motor-racing or

Photo: Lucy Dawkins; courtesy Goodwood Art Foundation; © Veronica Ryan

6. The Pavilion at Goodwood, designed by Studio Downie Architects

the roar of Spitfires on one part of the estate and a sanctuary for the calm contemplation of art and nature and the encouragement of wildlife and native species on another. 'Why can't we love racing and cars – we run all cars on sustainable fuel now anyway – *and* organic farming and food?' he asks me, perhaps slightly defensively. 'My mother was passionate about the environment and so is my wife. Our farm went organic thirty years ago.' Their approach to farming as well as landscape is sensitive to the environment. Estate-produced organic meat and cheese is served in Goodwood's restaurants and at events, and foraged food will also be on the menu at 24. 'The idea of eating the place is another important part of Goodwood,' he smiles, equilibrium regained.

The Duke describes himself as involved in everything that goes on at Goodwood but 'very, very, very involved' in the visitor experience. 'I mind how things look and feel, and I am pushing all the time for even the smallest detail to be right. We want people to have their own particular experience, and what feels like a private experience. How you deliver that is an interesting question.' One answer is to manage visitor numbers by charging adults £15. 'The revenue driven by attendance does not make much difference, but we don't want huge numbers as we don't want it to be crowded.' His mantra has always been that everyone has access to everything: 'No exclusions, no restrictions about getting close to things, no ropes.'

'Right now,' he says, 'the exciting part of the project for me is the art. It is a bit like when we started the Festival of Speed. The real challenge was how we were going to bring cars that no one had ever seen here. For the foundation, it is who can we entice here.' When I ask Rachel Whiteread how she was enticed, she says: 'Ann asked me. We have worked together a lot, and I trust her.' Trust, then, and attention to detail. 'It was important to work with the landscape, which did not really exist at the beginning,' she continues. 'Ann and I have been backwards and forwards here for a couple of years.'

Both the Duke and Ann Gallagher feel that the programming needed continuity. Gallagher is committed to five years at Goodwood. The next season is lined up and there is already a good idea of the foundation's subsequent, year-round programmes. As for the family, 'We have been here a long time and intend to be here a long time,' the Duke says. 'This is a long-term project and a long-term legacy.' Ⓐ

Susan Moore is associate editor of *Apollo*.

Goodwood Art Foundation at Goodwood, Chichester opened on 31 May. For more details, go to www.goodwoodartfoundation.org.

Photo: Tom Baigent; courtesy Studio Downie Architects LLP

A NEW LOOK

Sa
ndenbaum Galleries

The Met's Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, which holds art from the Americas, Africa and Oceania, is reopening after a four-year renovation. Now, this extraordinary collection of objects is being given more prominence than ever before

By Helen Stoilas

1. A series of *bis* poles made by the Asmat people of New Guinea on display in the Arts of Oceania gallery in the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

2. A stone sculpture of the Maya rain god Chahk, dating to 800–1,000 AD, stands in the Arts of the Ancient Americas gallery in the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing

For many visitors to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in recent years, the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing was a part of the museum that was rushed through, a darkly lit shortcut from the Greek and Roman galleries to the modern and contemporary art wing, the special exhibition galleries and the elevators to the rooftop garden. A head might be turned by the glitter of pre-Columbian gold or a stately African sculpture, but few explored the depths of the 40,000-square-foot space, which houses an exceptional collection of art from Africa, the Americas and Oceania. 'This was like a super highway,' acknowledges Alisa LaGamma, the curator in charge of the department. 'One of the problems was that you didn't have sight lines that extend to the furthest reaches of the wing.'

That has all changed following a four-year, $70m renovation of the galleries, designed by Kulapat Yantrasast of WHY Architecture in collaboration with Beyer Blinder Belle Architects, which reopened to the public on 31 May. Now, when visitors enter the first galleries in the wing, presenting African art, they are greeted by a light-filled expanse and a barrel-ribbed ceiling, inspired by the interior of the Great Mosque in Djenné, Mali. 'When we were guiding the architect to rethink the space with us, he said the original designers were coming at this project as modernists, they were accustomed to very institutional spaces,' LaGamma says. 'And we want to think outside of the box, in relation to the cultural landmarks and to the architecture that's relevant to the places that the art is from.' The galleries on the southern end of the wing (next to the new honeycombed UV-filtering glass curtain wall), which feature art from Central and South America, are based on the U-shaped structures of ancient sites such as Tikal in Guatemala. The arts of Oceanic cultures are installed diagonally, like a flowing sea across the middle of the wing.

'A priority for us was to give each of these three collections a character of their own,' LaGamma says, 'but also we didn't want them to be homogenised, so that you lost the sense that there are distinct traditions.' Each collection has a main entry point with an introduction, but is also broken into different 'chapters' explaining the varied cultures and traditions found across the regions.

The new architecture also helped decide the layout of the installation – the intense light now coming from the south-facing glass wall meant the more resilient stone and metal objects of the Americas collection would live happily there. In the original building, the shades on this side were almost invariably drawn, somewhat defeating the purpose of a glass wall. 'We measured how the light flows into the space,' LaGamma says, 'and the architect positioned two light mitigation walls so that we block out most of the harmful rays.'

'We also recognised that the Oceanic works are truly monumental, and they sit best in the high-ceilinged spaces,' LaGamma adds. So now towering works, like the carved *bis* poles created by the Asmat people of New Guinea as part of a ceremony about death and revenge, curve against the far end of the first gallery like a sacred grove, mirroring their traditional placement among the sago palms, where their symbolic fertility would feed into the forest floor (Fig. 1). 'Working with the architect on gutting this space was really an exercise in both making it work better for the collection and activating the entire space,' LaGamma says.

This reactivation can be found in all corners of the wing, which first opened to the public in 1982. That followed a decades-long effort to build a dedicated collection of art from these regions in the museum by Nelson A. Rockefeller, a long-time Met trustee and former New York governor and US vice-president. So dogged was Rockefeller that, when his aspirations for the Met were initially rebuffed in the 1930s, he went ahead and opened his own museum in 1957, in a brownstone owned by his family next door to the Museum of Modern Art. From a contemporary perspective, it was somewhat pejoratively named the Museum of Primitive Art, but its aims were to show that, as Rockefeller wrote, 'the creative expressions of great civilizations in Africa, Oceania, and Precolumbian America ranked on a par in terms of aesthetic value with great art forms of other so-called classical civilizations'.

Over the course of 30 years, the Museum of Primitive Art grew to include more than 3,500 works, many donated by other private collectors, and organised a number of blockbuster exhibitions and supported important scholarship. Rockefeller eventually convinced the Met to take the entire kit and caboodle – artworks and curatorial staff – to fill a new wing named after his son, who died during a collecting expedition to New Guinea in 1961. When the building finally opened, three years after the death of Nelson Rockefeller himself, the *New York Times* reported that it was almost as large as the nearby Whitney Museum of American Art's Breuer-designed home, half a mile south on Madison Avenue. 'It was a museum that was plunked down on the southern end of the Met,' LaGamma says.

For many years, the department operated like a private museum

This also meant that, for many years, the department essentially operated like a private museum within the museum, says LaGamma. An African sculpture specialist who was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (her father was an American diplomat), she has been a curator at the Met since 1996. This mentality is something else that has changed with the renovation. 'For the last decade, this project has been about really integrating this wing into the larger institution,' LaGamma says. So she has been working with her colleagues in charge of the adjoining galleries and other departments to include works that bring out 'parallels and differences' between cultures. 'Throughout, we're leveraging these bridges between the Rockefeller Wing and the museum at large, because that's what makes seeing this non-Western art a special experience.'

Previous spread photo and opposite page photo: Bridgit Beyer

3. View of the Arts of Africa gallery in the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing

The threshold to the Greek and Roman galleries, for example, features a Nubian stele, on long-term loan from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, drawing connections between the African and Egyptian collections. There is also a display case that has, on one side, a carved wooden mask by the Baule people of Côte d'Ivoire representing an ideal of femininity, and on the other a Roman stone mask of Pan. Both were linked to theatrical performances, but their materials and treatment of subject matter are very different. 'She's the beauty, he's the beast,' LaGamma says.

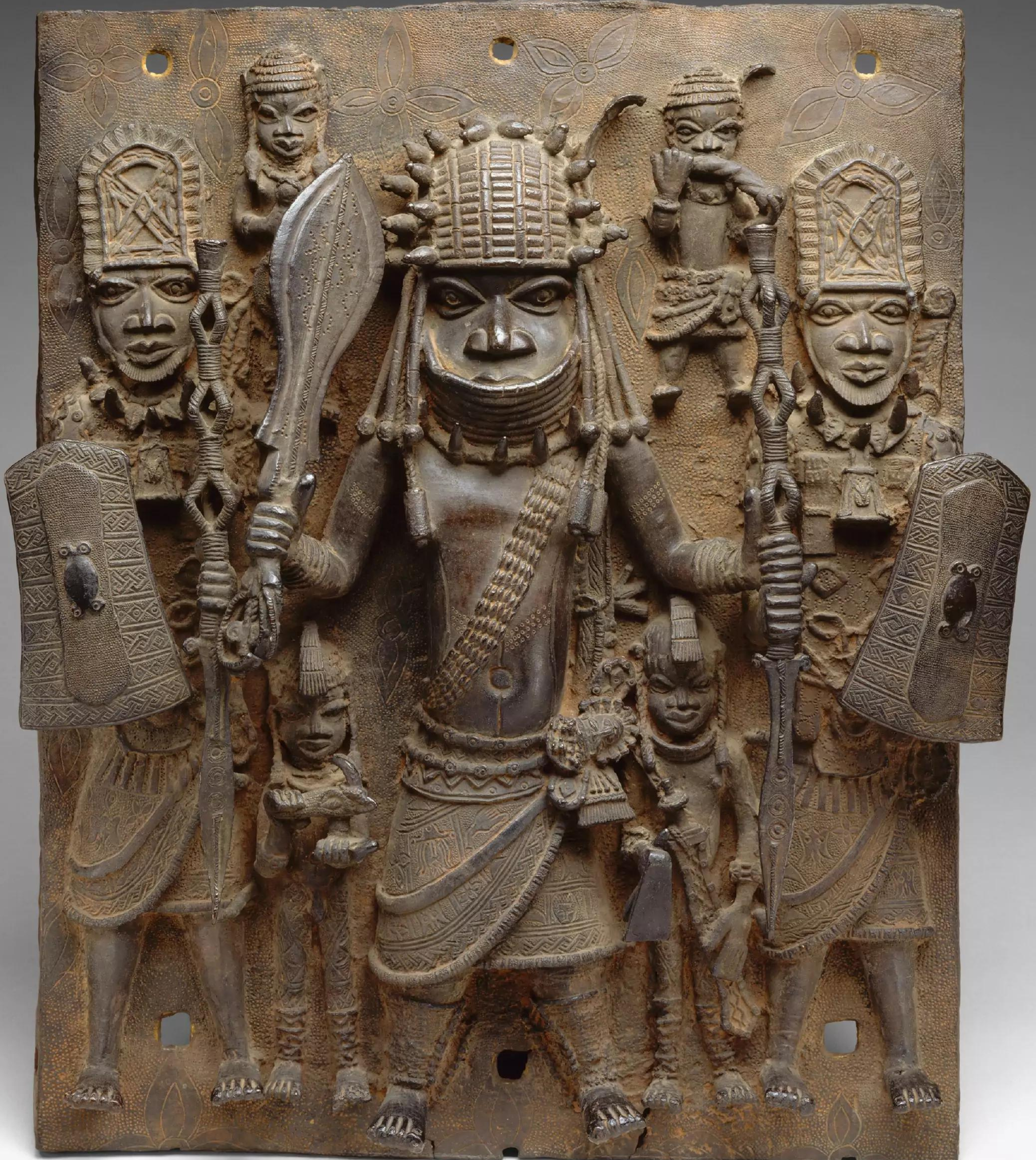
Another connection is made between the adjoining galleries for European sculpture and decorative arts through a display of ivory objects, including a delicate spoon and a side-blown horn known as an oliphant, carved by artisans living along the coast of West Africa for the earliest Portuguese traders, who arrived there at the end of the 1400s. According to LaGamma, 'Those kinds of works for export entered princely collections in Europe,' including those of the Habsburgs.

The collection is further enlivened, as other historic departments in the Met have been, by the inclusion of more contemporary art. There is a display of African photography, including work by the South African artist Zanele Muholi, a special exhibition on the Senegalese-French modernist Iba Ndiaye, bark paintings by the Australian Yolngu artist Nonggirrnga Marawili and a series of monumental wall panels by the artist Taloi Havini, who was born on Buka Island, Bougainville, which is in the Solomon Islands archipelago but administered by Papua New Guinea.

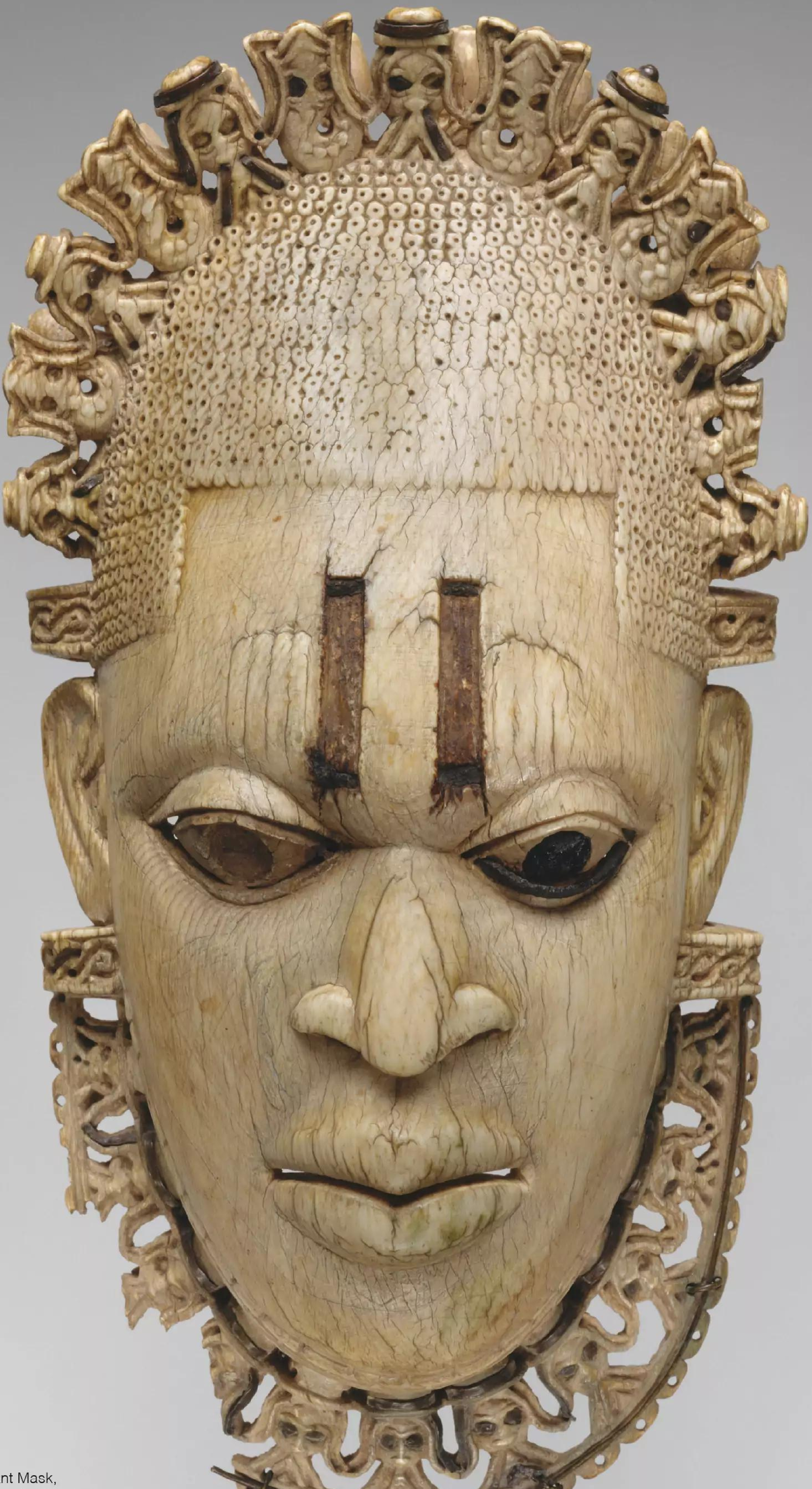
Havini's works, which will be visible from Central Park through the glass curtain wall, continue a tradition of the Met commissioning site-specific art for the Rockefeller Wing. Its famous Kwoma ceiling, recreating a ceremonial structure found in the Asmat region in New Guinea and made up of painted panels, was commissioned from artists in the village of Mariwai by the department's first chair, Douglas Newton, for the opening of the original building. A new video feature in the gallery tells this history and includes the names and photographs of some of the artists; the ceiling's reinstallation was done in consultation with the artists' descendants.

LaGamma aims consistently to give long-overdue credit to previously unidentified artists who created objects in the Met's collection. 'One of the things that has always been important to me as a curator here is to get to the heart of who the individuals who created these works were,' she says. Dozens of pieces in the African and Oceanic galleries now include artist bios, although these have been harder to source for the archaeological materials in the Americas collection. Among the artists receiving this treatment is Olowe of Ise, who was active in south-western Nigeria at the start of the 20th century. 'He was highly sought after by Yoruba sovereigns in the Ekiti region who, after years of civil war, were refurbishing their palaces,' LaGamma says. The new installation includes the left side of an impressively carved palace door, commissioned in 1904 to commemorate the visit of a British delegation to the court, on loan as a promised gift from the collection of Carol and Jerome Kenney. The other half of the door is now in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art.

A concerted effort has also been made to include media and materials that were historically absent from the collection, such as textiles, beadwork, basketry and pottery – things often considered 'womens' work'. Such artforms were 'critical to the aesthetic landscapes in all of these cultures,' LaGamma says, 'so we've tried to insist in each of the chapters that we have a better balance to incorporate these.' A gorgeous tie-dyed ceremonial robe or cloak,



4. Plaque depicting warrior and attendants, 16th–17th century, Nigeria, Court of Benin, brass, 47.6 × 38. × 10.8 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



5. Queen Mother Pendant Mask,
16th century, Nigeria, Court of Benin, ivory,
iron, brass and coal, 23.8 × 12.7 × 6.4cm.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

6. A display case of gold Chiriqui figures in the Arts of the Ancient Americas galleries in the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing

painstakingly handwoven from raffia fibres by Dida women in southern Côte d'Ivoire, for example, not only rounds out an understanding of the masks and sculptures displayed alongside it, but also speaks to a history of fashion innovation. 'This kind of fabric inspired Issey Miyake in the creation of his pleated clothing,' LaGamma says.

Around a quarter of the works in the African displays are new acquisitions and donations from long-time patrons of the department, LaGamma adds, such as Ceil and Michael E. Pulitzer, who endowed the curator's post. Even the works that have been in the Met's collection for decades have been given an update. For example, a gallery of some 40 objects made for the court of Benin includes a video showing artists from the Igun Eronmwon (the brass-casting guild) working today in Benin City, Nigeria. The display of a set of 16th-century brass plaques, looted by British forces in a raid on the royal palace of Benin in 1897, also presents recent art historical research by Kathryn Wysocki Gunsch, curator at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Fig. 4). She found that these objects had originally been commissioned to wrap the interior columns of the Oba's private audience chamber and were rarely seen by outsiders. When the British invaded, they had been in storage for more than a century.

The Met relates the tumultuous history of the Kingdom of Benin in wall text, but it downplays the continuing controversy over the dispersal of the court's art. As part of a wave of recent repatriations from international museums, the Met returned two panels and an Ife head to Nigeria in 2021, but retains around 160 works of art taken from Benin, including the ivory Queen Mother Pendant Mask, a jewel of the Rockefeller collection (Fig. 5). A note at the end of one wall text says that a Memorandum of Understanding between the Met and Nigeria was recently signed 'fostering ongoing exchanges' and that the museum is one of 136 contributors to the Digital Benin database, funded by the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung, which catalogues the collection of the Benin court.

All this work on the collection reflects a department-wide effort to keep the interpretation of these holdings up to date – something that became painfully clear was not possible within the limitations of the old building. 'We felt frustrated that we were able to do these incredible special exhibitions outside of the wing, that kept up and advanced the understanding of these artistic traditions. But then once those shows came down, they weren't incorporated into the lasting footprint of the permanent collection,' LaGamma says. 'So, we were marching along on one route, but the permanent collection wasn't changing enough.'

This was because the first generation of curators who were planning the wing took the view that 'You don't need much information, you just commune with these objects, and the formal qualities were enough,' LaGamma adds. This ignored the spiritual, ceremonial or mythological aspects behind much of the work on view. 'We know that that's a disservice to the complexity of the art, not to offer up that information. The very existence of this wing generated excitement and scholarship and a wave of new content. Not to flow that in with the experience of viewing the art – it's an abnegation of your expertise as an institution,' LaGamma says. 'Hopefully this addition, in 30 years, will need an upgrade.' Ⓐ

Helen Stoilas is a freelance writer based in New York and a former editor of the *Art Newspaper*.

The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, reopened on 31 May (metmuseum.org).

Photo: Paula Lobo

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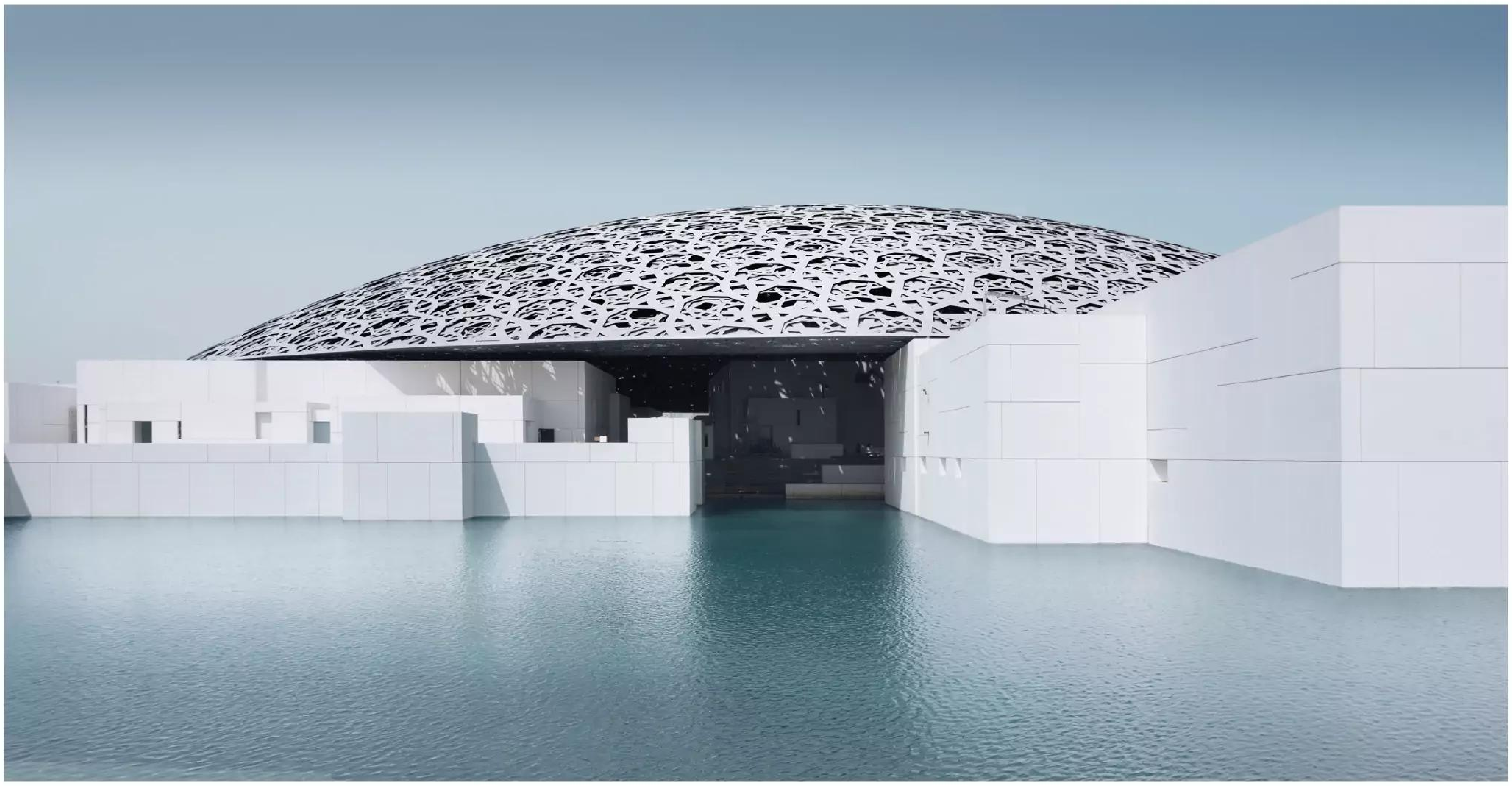
Art Market

Hot property

With a slew of new projects, the UAE's art scene is having a moment. This time, it looks set to last, writes Jane Morris



1. A view of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, which opened in 2017

The international art market can be fickle. Its first flurry of interest in the United Arab Emirates was in the early 2000s, when the art world was rapidly becoming more global. Suddenly contemporary artists from the Middle East – as well as Brazil, Russia, India and China – were all the rage.

Christie's held its first modern and contemporary art auction in Dubai in 2006, making a respectable $8.5m for Arab, Iranian and Indian artists. A year later, the first edition of the Art Dubai fair opened, founded by a pair of entrepreneurial Brits (Fig. 2). The UAE's Abu Dhabi-based government started to negotiate deals with the Louvre and the Guggenheim to build offshoots of the world-famous museums.

The financial crash of 2008 was a severe setback. But nearly two decades on, as its economy booms, the UAE is back in the spotlight. Sotheby's, which opened an office in Dubai in 2017, showed off a $100m collection of coloured diamonds in Abu Dhabi in April before their sale in Geneva. This followed the revelation last year that an Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth fund, ADQ, had paid $1bn for a 25–30 per cent stake in the auction house.

Edward Gibbs, chairman of Sotheby's Middle East and India, says that the region is now 'extremely important in terms of growing revenue and deepening the relationship with our new co-owners'. He has worked in the Gulf since the early 1990s and believes that 'there is huge potential in the Middle East. There was a pause after the financial crash, but the UAE is surging back'. He says that the number of bidders from the region has grown by 70 per cent over the past five years.

Christie's is also eyeing the Gulf again. It has had an office in Dubai since 2005 and is increasing its staffing in the city. 'The UAE, and indeed the Gulf as a whole, is a market of great potential. We are very excited by it,' says Anthea Peers, president of Christie's Europe, Middle East and Africa. She says that sales of modern Middle Eastern art, a favourite of local collectors, trebled in value between 2020 and 2024.

Months of speculation that Art Basel would launch a fair in the Gulf – possibly in Abu Dhabi, with which is it believed to have had lengthy discussions – came to an end last month with the announcement that the fair had finally clinched a deal with neighbouring Qatar, about an hour's flying time from Dubai. Art Basel Qatar will launch in February 2026, a move that the *Financial Times* declared 'cements the Middle East as the next frontier in the global art market'.

The fair will no doubt give a boost to Qatar's burgeoning art scene, which has opened five major museums and several arts spaces since 2008. But for now, almost all commercial galleries in the region are based in Dubai. April's edition of Art Dubai was judged by many to the best edition for many years. Maliha Tabari, a pioneer of the Emirati art scene who founded Tabari Artspace in 2003, says: 'In many ways we are still on a learning curve. But this year Art Dubai brought in really interesting international curators and museums, and they found what we are doing fascinating.'

The organisers of the fair say that curators came from overseas museums including the Tate, the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Major collectors, including Usha Mittal and Sultan Sooud Al Qassimi, a member of Sharjah's royal family, were spotted. International galleries are once again moving in: Continua opened

Photo: Mohamed Somji; © Louvre Abu Dhabi

ART DUBAI
DIGITAL

2. The Art Dubai fair, in the grounds of the Madinat Jumeirah Hotel

in Dubai in 2021 and Perrotin in January, and locals say that others are looking too.

The shift in international perception has come as the UAE has transformed itself faster than expected. The seven emirates that make up the union – Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, Umm Al Quwain and Ajman – were once a series of small pearl fisheries bordered by Saudi Arabia, Oman and the Persian Gulf. From the 19th century to the 1960s they were a British protectorate. Oil was first discovered in Umm Shaif near Das Island, Abu Dhabi, in 1958; by 1972, all seven were independent and had formed the UAE, with Abu Dhabi as its capital.

Oil has made the emirates wealthy. The UAE pumps nearly 5m barrels a day and, according to OPEC, has bigger crude oil reserves than Russia. Oil earns the federation roughly $100bn a year, or $100,000 per Emirati citizen. There are an estimated 10m people in the UAE, of which only 1m are citizens – full citizenship is open to foreigners only in rare circumstances.

But the current boom owes more to the government's determination to create a robust post-oil economy; oil now accounts for less than a third of its GDP. The government has used its oil wealth to invest strategically in important industries at home and abroad and, led by Dubai, has created low-regulation, low-tax economic zones.

The UAE signed normalised diplomatic relations with Israel in 2020 and decided not to implement sanctions against Russia. Israelis and Russians have moved to the region, joining Americans, Europeans, Indians and Africans, as well as Lebanese, Palestinians and Jordanians. They are attracted by high-paid, low-taxed jobs and the ease of setting up businesses. The *Economist*, in a report coinciding with the COP 28 climate-change conference hosted in Dubai in 2023, wrote: 'The messier the world gets the more the UAE seems to thrive.'

The strategy appears to be working. The non-oil parts of the economy have been growing at six per cent a year since 2022, the *Economist* reports. Henley & Partners, an international wealth management firm, placed the UAE at the top of its list of 'millionaire inflows', with an estimated 6,700 moving there in 2024. 'Post-Covid, Dubai has become a magnet for talent and money, and that means more people buying homes, living here and buying works of art,' says Elie Khouri, a Lebanese-French entrepreneur and art collector.

Meanwhile, the government has been investing in big-ticket cultural projects, especially in Abu Dhabi. In April, the UAE hosted its annual Culture Summit, a glittering event by arts conference standards. Speakers included the former prime ministers of New Zealand, Slovakia and Mauritius, 20 international culture and education ministers and senior executives from Google, as well as architects, artists and museum directors.

The conference took place on Saadiyat Island, a new culture and tourism district created with an initial budget of $27bn. The Louvre Abu Dhabi opened there in 2017 (Fig. 1), the Abrahamic Family House interfaith centre in 2023 and the new teamLab Phenomena in April. They will be soon joined by the Foster + Partners-designed Zayed National Museum, the Mecanoo-designed Natural History Museum and Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. The total cost of all of these is undisclosed but construction alone must have cost several billion dollars.

This huge investment in culture is encouraging new galleries to open in Dubai and even in more restrained Abu Dhabi. Maryam Al Falasi set up Iris Projects last November in Mina Zayed – a former industrial area near Abu Dhabi's port that also houses the independent, non-profit arts space 421. 'Abu Dhabi is the perfect ecosystem, you have the artists, you have the collectors and the museums. The only thing that was missing was a contemporary gallery,' Al Falasi says, explaining why she chose the capital.

NIKA Project Space opened in Dubai in 2023 to focus on artists from 'marginalised countries such as Mongolia and Kazakhstan', according to its Russian founder, former lawyer Veronika Berezina. 'It's exciting to be a part of this evolving art scene and to be able to bring something meaningful to it,' she says.

Efie Gallery, founded in 2021 by London-, Ghana- and Dubai-based Valentina Mintah and her two sons, Kwame and Kobi, is gaining a reputation for exciting shows. It focuses on artists of African origin and earlier this year opened a large new space in Alserkal Avenue, with a music room and cafe attached.

Photo: Spark Media

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3. Alserkal Avenue, in the former industrial zone of Al Quoz, Dubai

Kwame Mintah says that the mindset in the UAE is part of the appeal. 'The ease of doing business here means you don't have time to doubt yourself – it is so fast to get something off the ground. And the city is very diverse, it's very appealing to be somewhere where almost everyone else is an immigrant too.'

Attitudes to art are less constrained, he says. 'In the West, everything to do with African art is looked at through the lens of colonisation. That is an important topic, but we wanted to get to the point where African art has the same level of freedom as everything else, where anything can be "African".'

'It's almost overwhelming how fast things have developed,' says Sunny Rahbar, who founded The Third Line gallery in 2005. 'When we opened, there was almost nothing going on here – you couldn't even find picture framers. And now we are in another super-growth phase: there are new, good-quality galleries, there are new collectors, even young people in the tech sector, the "crypto bros", are buying art.'

But with 20 years' experience, Rahbar knows that things can easily change. 'There's been a series of booms and busts here. Maybe we've arrived at a place where we're going to stabilise, but you never know,' she says.

There are other reasons that anyone looking for a quick return in the UAE should be cautious. The scene is still small – there are maybe as few as 30 galleries, insiders say – and prices are relatively low. At Art Dubai, Zawyeh Gallery, based in Dubai and Ramallah, sold works by Nabil Anani priced between $100,000 and $650,000, but most sales were in the $30,000 range.

The focus of most local collectors is on the artists of the Middle East and not beyond. 'People are very patriotic and support the art of their region,' says Katia Nounou Boueiz, deputy chairman of Sotheby's Middle East. Many more prefer to buy luxury goods – watches, jewellery, cars and high-end property, which has boomed in recent years.

Grassroots aspects of the art scene remain under-developed – opportunities for artists to study and work in the UAE in the early part of their careers are limited. 'There's a great sense of community and appreciation and patronage,' says Faisal Al Hassan, director of 421. But affordable studio space in such expensive cities is hard to find. 'There's a big gap [for artists] before they have representation by international galleries or show in major institutions. And there aren't yet enough curators who are trained here and can talk about our region,' he says.

For all its many attractions, life in the UAE is not for everyone. The emirates have set out ambitious targets to reach net zero by 2050 but they have a long way to go. The climate means that per capita carbon emissions are some of the highest in the world, according to the Global Carbon Project. It is socially one of the most liberal states in the region but politically is a de facto autocracy, and media comment on the government, the royal families and religion is tightly controlled. Many accept this for the trade-offs – prosperity and security – but it may appeal less to more politically minded artists, curators or art critics.

Nevertheless, for many the UAE remains one of the most exciting emerging regions in the art world. Mariët Westermann, director of the Guggenheim group of museums, was in Abu Dhabi to speak at the Culture Summit, after several years as vice-chancellor of NYU Abu Dhabi. 'It is utterly inspiring to work in a country with long-term vision and the willingness to put resources into its cultural endeavours,' she says. 'If people spend time here, they will get a different picture: this is a flourishing, cohesive and diverse society.'

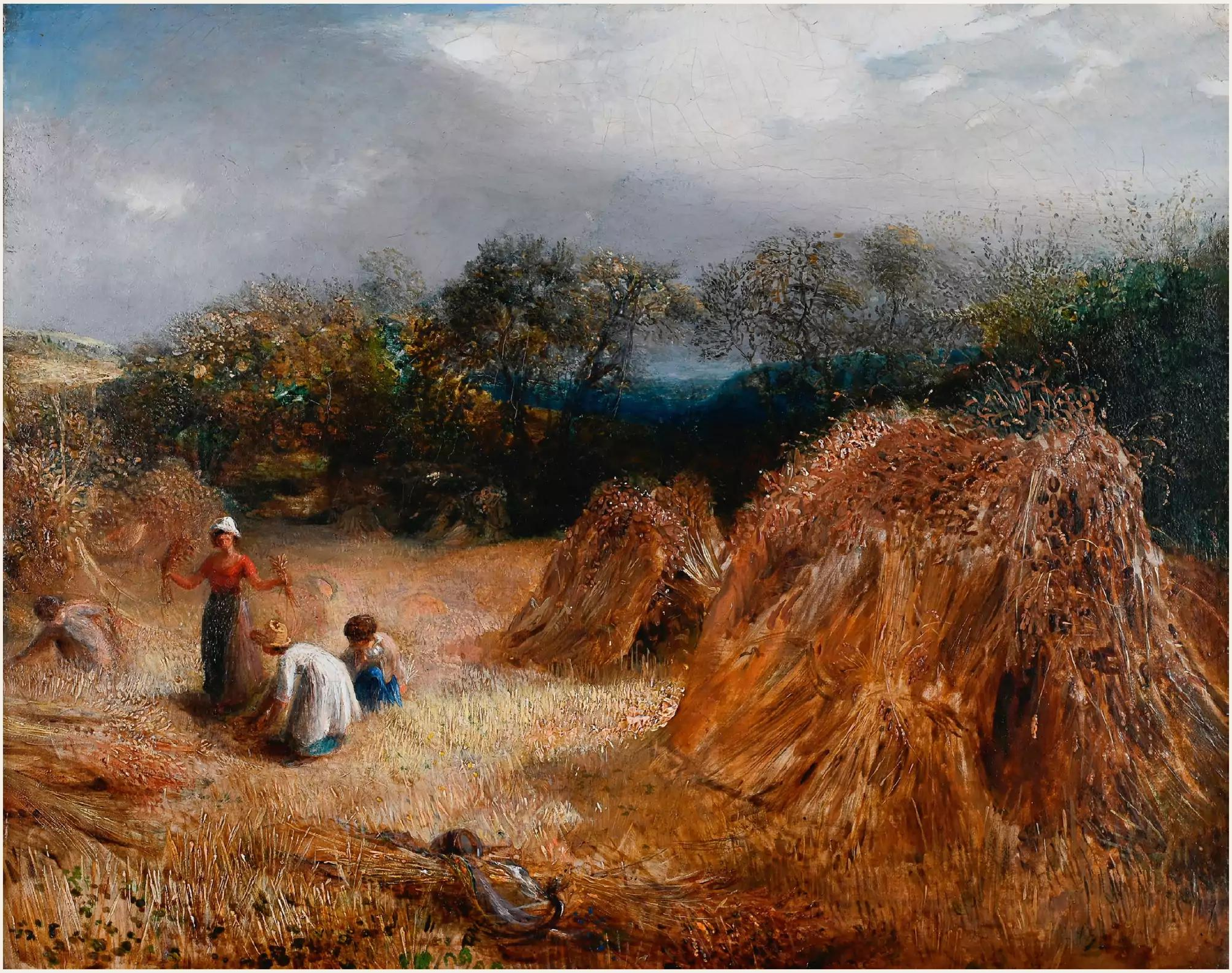
The summit coincided with the closing days of the new Public Art Biennial Abu Dhabi. It presented work by nearly 60 artists and collectives, including 40 new commissions, in public spaces around the city. Some of the overseas artists were in town and contrasted the funding and enthusiasm of the UAE government with shrinking budgets and political interest at home. 'Artists want the chance to make the best work they can,' one said. 'This region feels like the future.' Ⓐ

Jane Morris is an independent writer, editor and commentator.

Courtesy Alserkal Arts Foundation

TALES FROM THE ART CRYPT

WORKS FROM THE RICHARD FEIGEN COLLECTION



SAMUEL PALMER (BRITISH 1805-1881)
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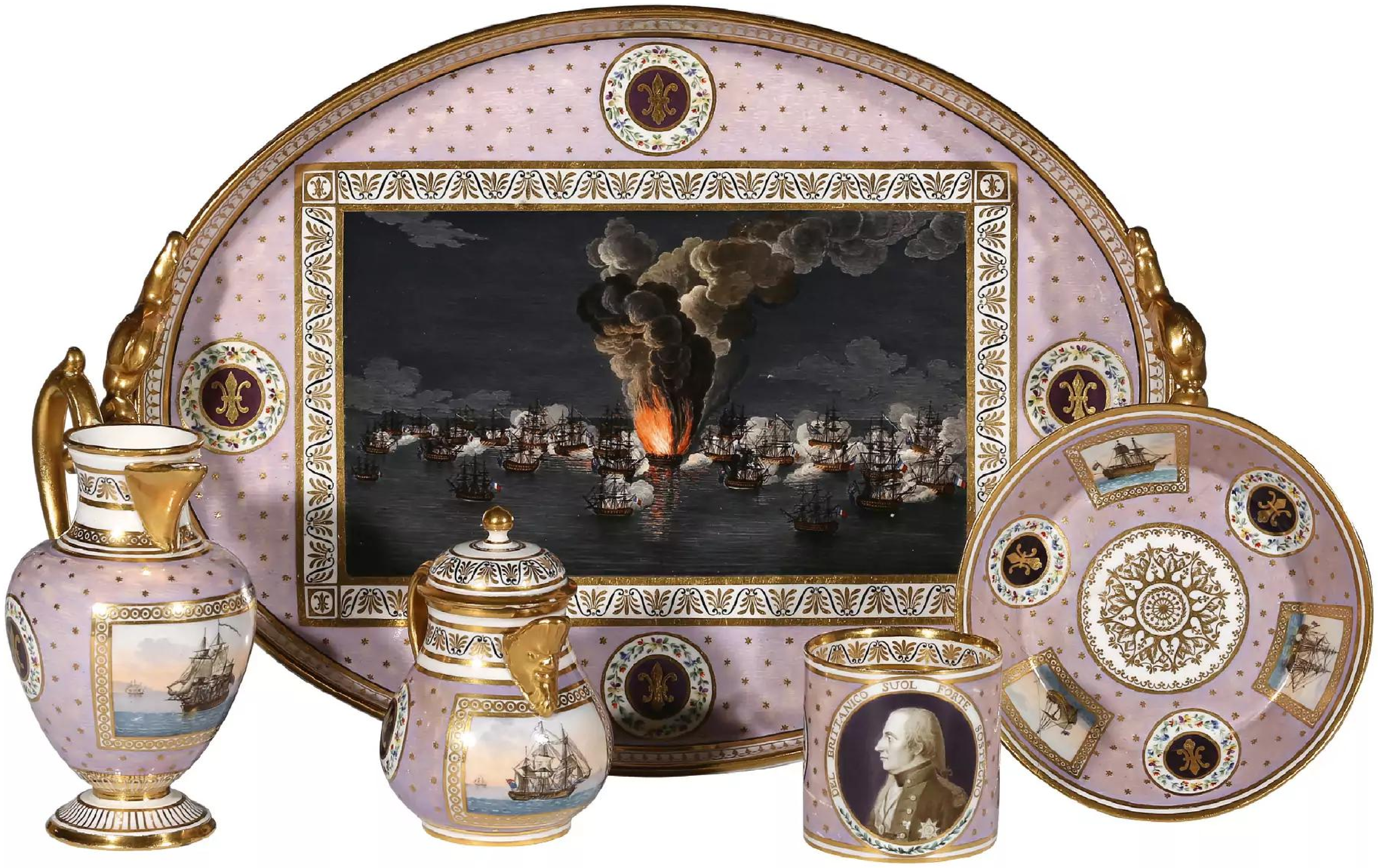


1. Five-part tea service, 1798, Real Fabbrica Ferdinandea, Naples, porcelain, width 35.4cm (tray). E&H Manners, low six-figure sum

Courtesy E&H Manners Ltd

In December 2008 a tin-glazed earthenware armorial dish, elaborately moulded and painted in blue, orange, yellow and manganese, came up for sale at Bonhams London (Fig. 2). Made in *c.* 1649–51 and signed with the initials REN, the dish came from the Pickleherring Quay pottery, pioneers in English delftware, established in Southwark by Christian Wilhelm in around 1618. The dish commemorates the union of the Markham and Faringe families. Bought by the Milwaukee Art Museum for £54,000, it is one of very few surviving early commemorative wares, dating to the fraught political moment after the execution of Charles I, when the Puritans were stamping out such ostentation. Related commemorative delftware includes a Pickleherring dish in the V&A depicting Charles I, dated 1653, four years after his death. It seems people were prepared to celebrate their good fortune – and expose their Royalist sympathies – through their choice of ceramics, even at this critical time.

It was not until the restoration of Charles II in 1660, however, that the commemorative ceramics business really got going in England. At first, delftware continued to be an important medium and royalty a primary subject. Today these pieces are highly sought after, especially in the United States – many 17th-century British settlers brought English delftware with them to the New World. In 2021 at Christie's New York a 'blue dash' dish from the Longridge Collection of Syd Levethan, featuring a portrait of the king in his robes of office and dated 1672, the year of Charles II's Declaration of Indulgence, achieved $62,500. A similar dish dated 1662 – possibly commemorating Charles's wedding to Catherine of Braganza – from the collection of Benjamin F. Edwards III had sold in 2010 at Christie's New York for $170,500. Last November, a large delftware tankard from a Bristol pottery with a rare portrait of Queen Anne, dated 1702–14, achieved £14,080 at Bonhams London. At the same house this April, a delftware charger from the late 17th century with blue-dash border, possibly featuring a bold General Sir Thomas Fairfax on a horse, was chased to £9,600 against a £6,000–£8,000 estimate.

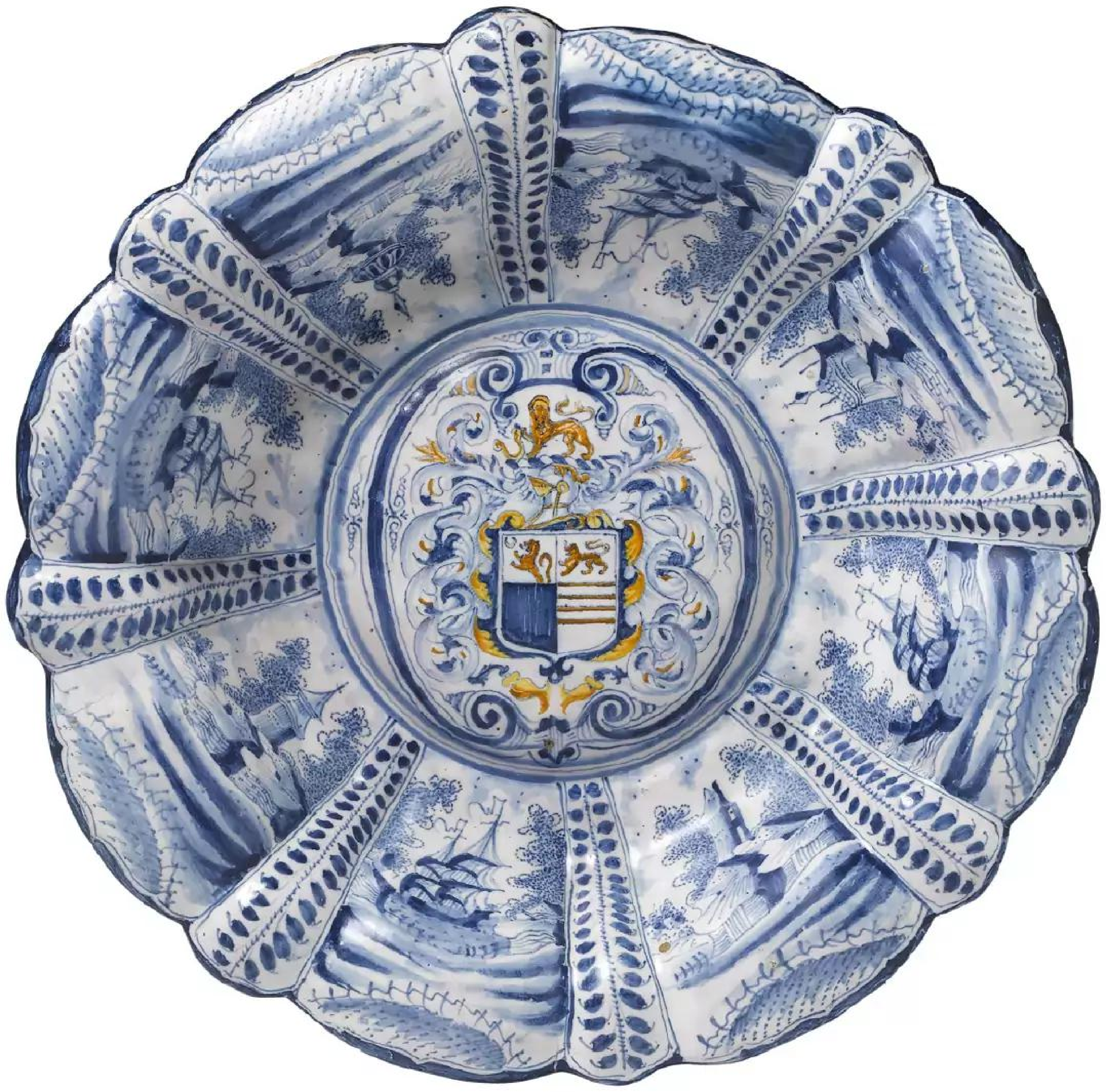
Alongside delftware, Thomas Toft from Burslem in Stoke-on-Trent began to make commemorative chargers in the local Staffordshire slipware, trailing lively portraits of Charles II and his queen in light- and dark-brown slip over a cream-coloured ground. His work is highly prized today: at Christie's London in 2016 a particularly fine Royal Arms charger (*c.* 1660–75) signed by Toft, one of only seven recorded, fetched £122,500 – more than £20,000 over estimate.

From 1750, the invention of transfer printing brought down the costs of commemorative wares dramatically, and turbulent politics and a succession of wars stimulated an explosion of production. John Cockburn of Pickleherring Antique Pottery has available a rare mug featuring a portrait of George III and signed 'I. Sadler Liverpool', which may have been produced in 1763 to celebrate victory in the Seven Years' War. John Sadler and his partner Guy Green were pioneers of transfer printing, serving the Staffordshire potteries. Transfer printing allowed the same images – a portrait and a ship, perhaps – to be used repeatedly, with a different battle and different date added. Recurring heroic figures include the dashing admirals Lords Nelson and Rodney. There is a brisk market for such pieces. Burnside notes that 'Some events will have a niche but very commercial appeal. For many of the pieces, if they did not have a Rodney or Nelson on them, they would fetch very little.' Errol Manners of London dealership E&H Manners has just sold a small five-part tea service for a low six-figure sum (Fig. 1). It was made in the Real Fabbrica Ferdinandea (or Royal Porcelain Factory) in Naples, as a gift from the Queen of Naples to then Rear Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson in 1798, and features a portrait of 'our brave deliverer' after he disembarked in Italy fresh from winning the Battle of the Nile.'The market was strong 15 to 20 years ago,' Manners says,'but there is still depth of interest today for rare pieces.'

Nic Saintey, ceramics specialist at auctioneers Bearnes, Hampton & Littlewood, agrees that 'Commemorative ceramics are not as popular as they once were – especially the royal ones.' But he notes continuing interest in anti-Napoleonic, anti-French ceramics – a strong feature of the British Museum's 2018 show 'Pots with Attitude: British Satire on Ceramics, 1760–1830' – and commemoratives relating to campaigns against slavery or for the poor. There is also 'a strong following' for Jacobite punchbowls, when they appear: 'You would have paid with your life to own one of those.' In the May 2021 sale of Property of the Earls of Breadalbane and Holland, Lyon & Turnbull sold a 'Jacobite Punch-Bowl (Qianlong period)', part of a small group of Jacobite Chinese export porcelain wares, decorated with a copy of one of the most prolifically produced and recognisable engravings of Prince Charles, the Young Pretender, by Sir Robert Strange, an engraver from Edinburgh and member of the prince's Lifeguards regiment during the '45. Although chipped, it fetched £14,375. Katherine Wright, a senior specialist in European decorative arts at Lyon & Turnbull, comments: 'Good provenance will always add interest and value. Condition is also important, as the market is in this area is generally selective. However, for a very rare piece people will overlook damage or restoration.' She notes that commemorative wares attract an overlapping clientele of those interested in the specific historical figures, events or subject matter and those interested in the style or manufacturer – Delftware, Spode, Royal Doulton, Wemyss Ware or Prattware.

Independent dealer John Howard notes that interest in social history has dropped generally, but 'Those who are still keen are very keen.' Established in 1976, he has just experienced his most financially successful year. He notes that while collectors used to focus on commemoratives as a group, now they have niche specialisms: 'Naval, military, boxing, theatrical, murders, crimes, Acts of Parliament, railways, coal mining.' Seventy-five per cent of his clients are American, meaning that anything with an American connection, however tenuous, is sought after. This is a mature market: 'People are very specific about what they are looking for, and very particular about condition,' he says. Nevertheless, 'If I can find the right, rare thing, it is easy to sell.' He finds especially touching ceramics celebrating particular marriages – and the ceramic figures produced to commemorate the 1823 Marriage Act. Industrialisation brought costs right down, though design often suffered. There is little market for pieces later than 1851, although Howard observes some market for Eric Ravilious's collaborations with Wedgwood (Two coronation mugs, 1937 and 1953, sold at Bonhams London in April for £704).

Andrew Hilton, owner of specialist auction house Historical & Collectable, has been part of the market in commemoratives for more than 45 years. He thinks the market has declined from a peak around 1995 to 2005, though the American market is still strong. He confirms the strength of special interests – 'Railway pieces from the 1830s, pieces commemorating the Great Reform Act or the Peterloo Massacre, rare pieces such as those commemorating the 1803 Great Invasion Scare' – but 'Prices are not what they were.' He quotes John May, an early specialist in the field: 'Commemoratives are the fascinating small change of our national heritage.'



2. Armorial delftware moulded dish, *c.* 1649–51, tin-glazed porcelain, diam. 39cm. Bonhams London, £54,000

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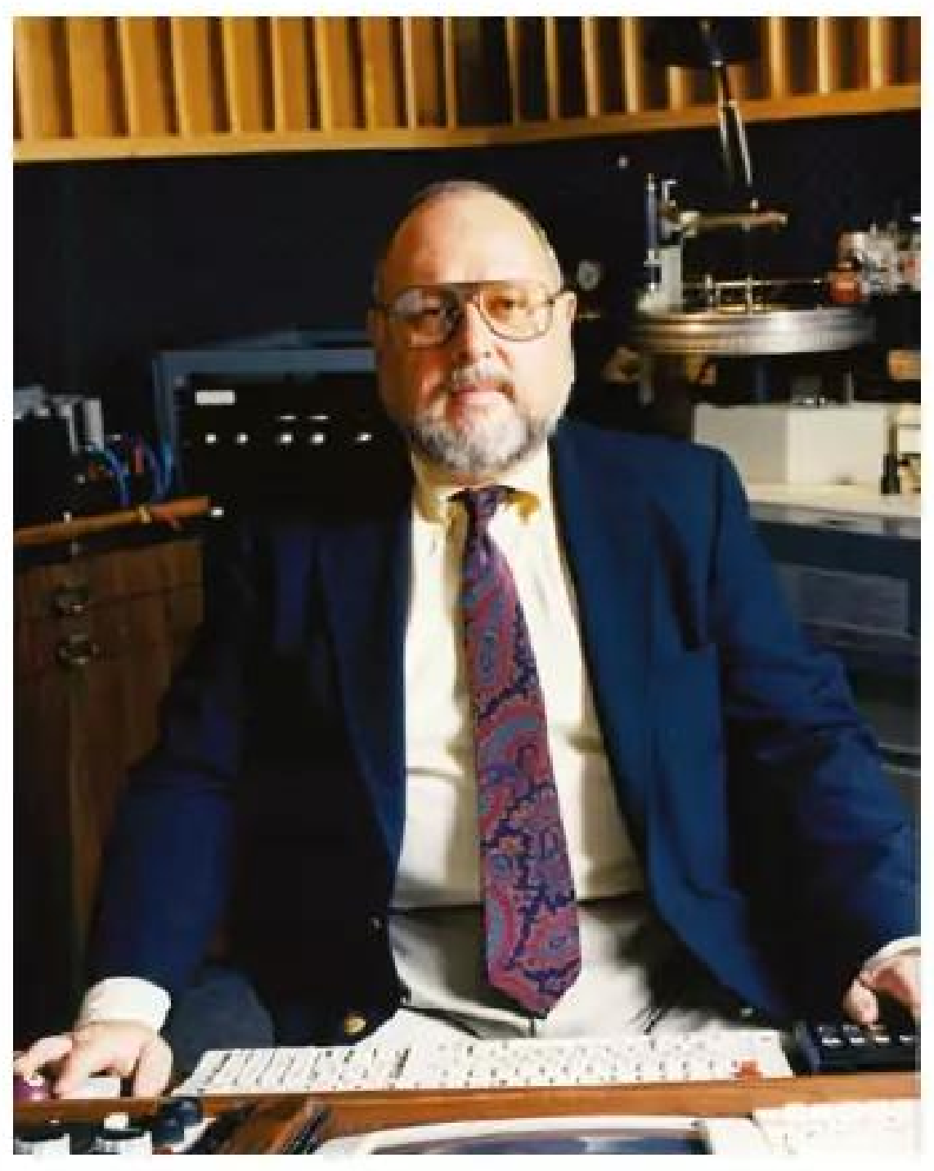

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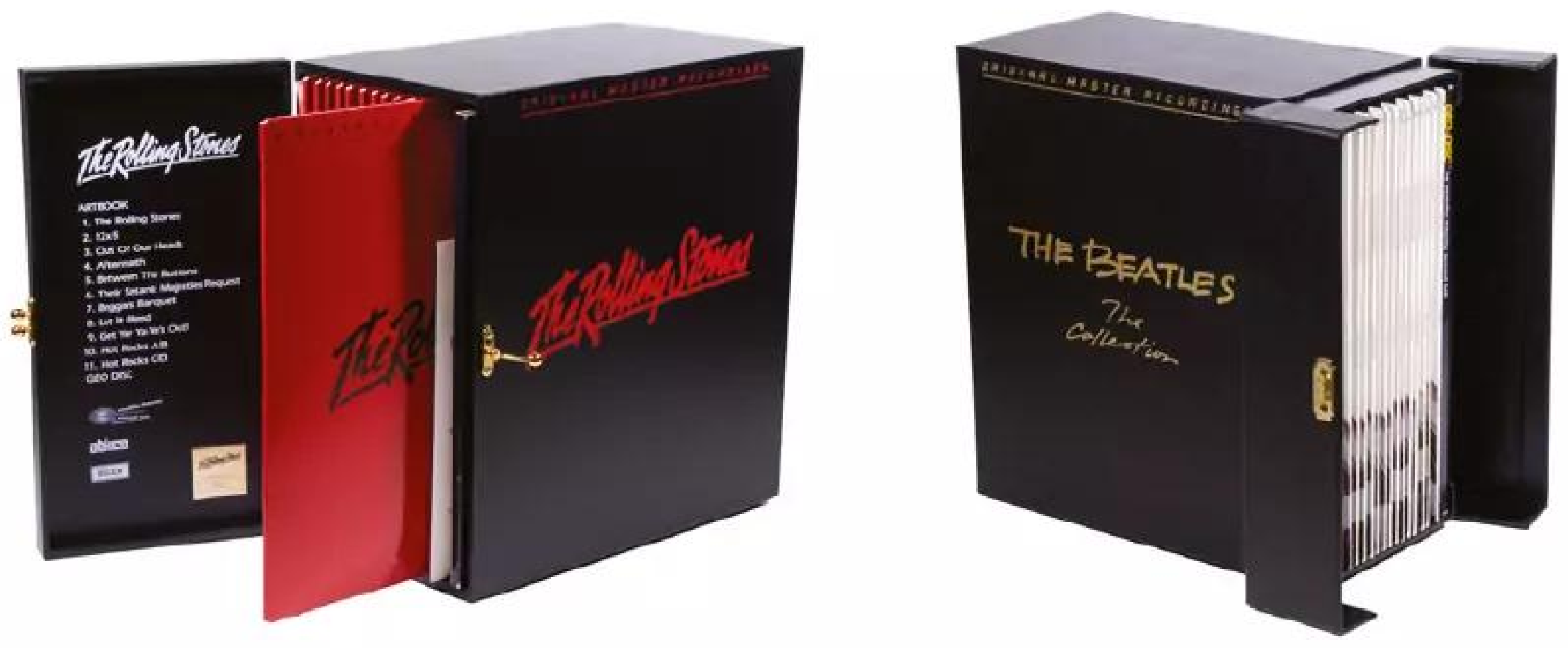

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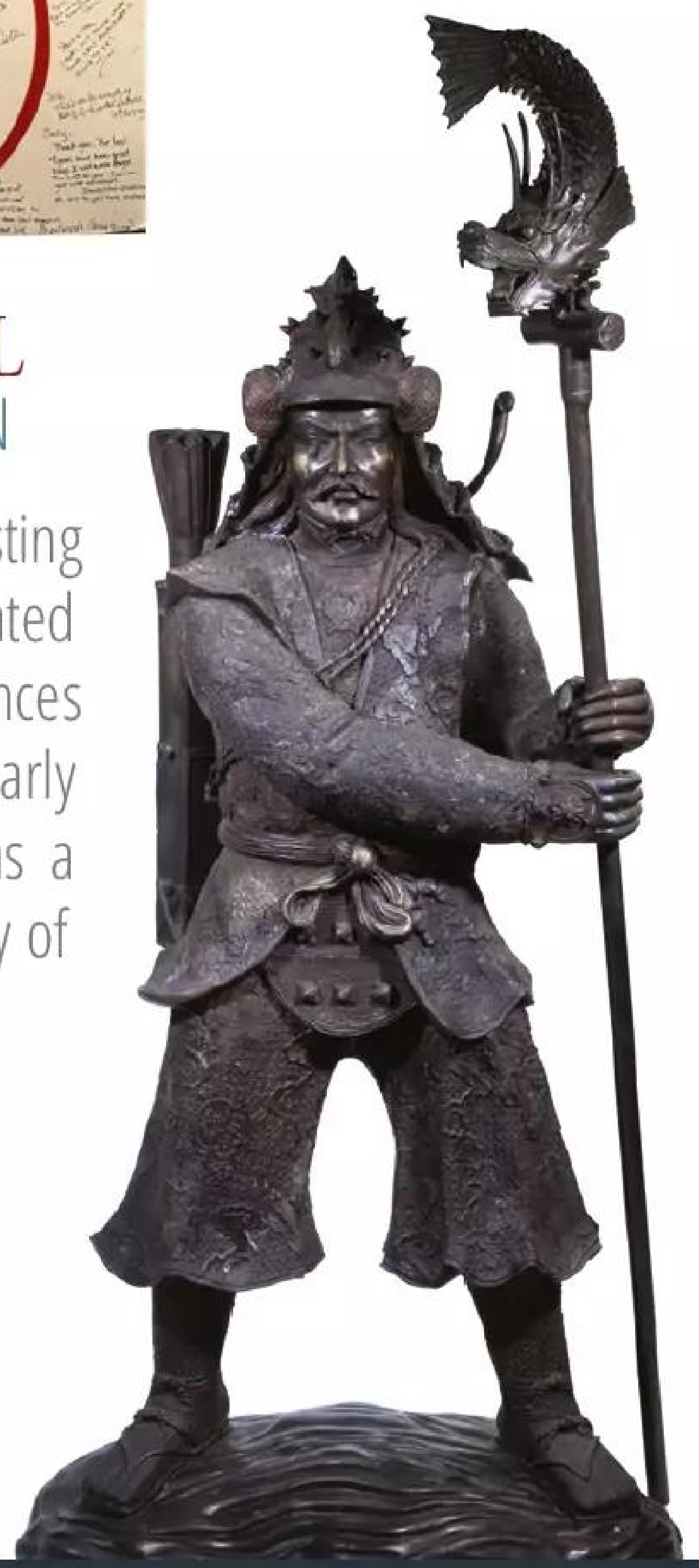

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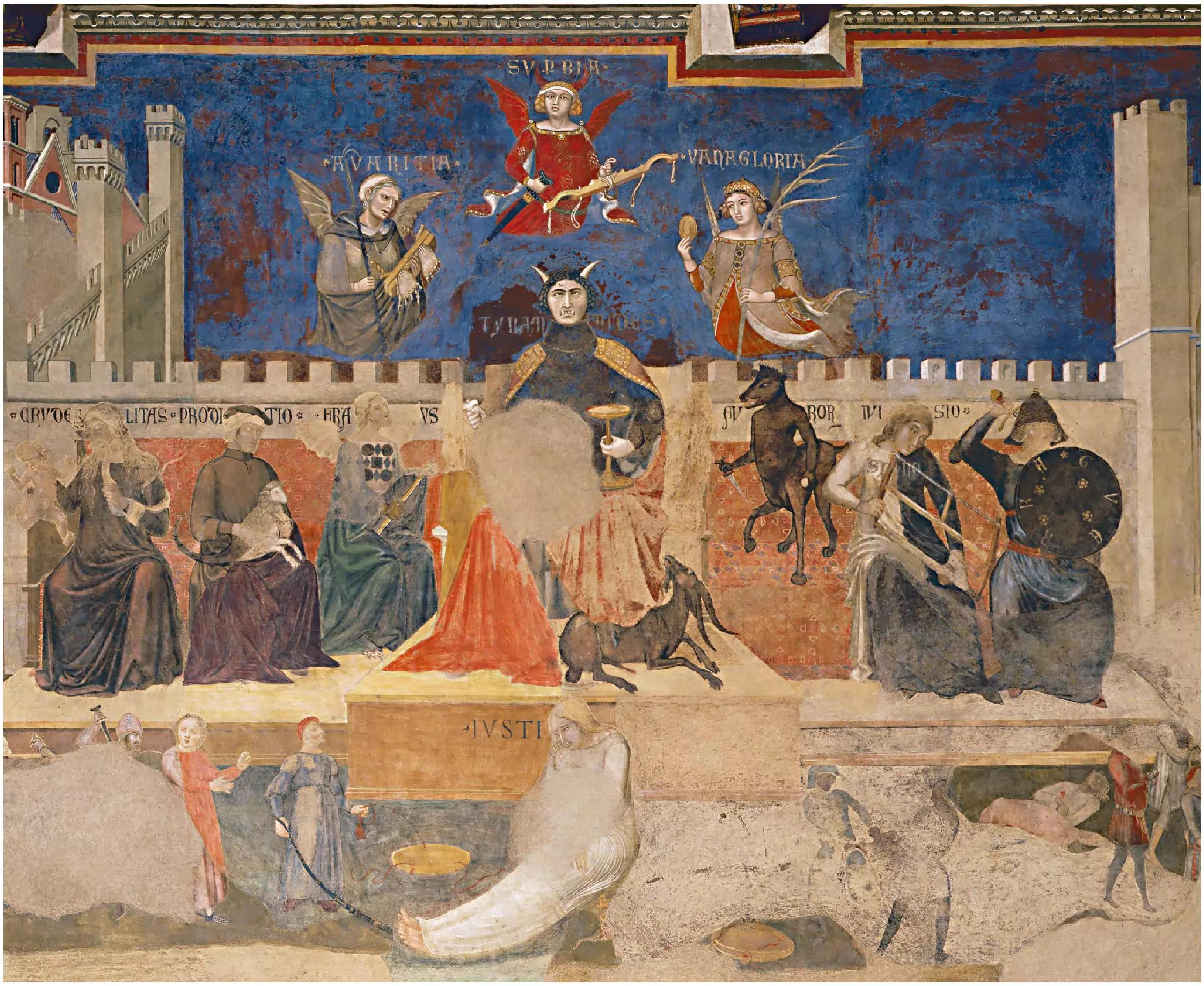

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EXHIBITIONS *Hiroshige's masterful prints at the British Museum, the Yale Center for British Art reopens, and Frida Kahlo's fruitful month in Paris* BOOKS *Political frescoes in Siena, Vanessa Bell and the Bloomsbury Group, and art vs AI*

Detail from the Tyrannical Commune in *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* (1338) by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (d. 1348?) in the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena

Photo: © Antonio Quattrone

Block party

Hiroshige's landscapes remain brilliant despite some clumsy curation, writes ***Craig Burnett***

Hiroshige: Artist of the Open Road
1 May–7 September
British Museum, London

Catalogue by Alfred Haft
ISBN 9780714137001 (hardback), £30
(British Museum Press)

In his preface to *One Hundred Views of Fuji*, published posthumously in 1859, Utagawa Hiroshige wrote that he wanted to make 'true-to-life landscapes' that would 'give others a few moments of pleasure without the inconvenience of a long journey'. More than a century and a half later, 'Hiroshige: Artist of the Open Road' offers a vivid demonstration of the artist's enduring ability to transport viewers to snowy mountains, riverside picnics and rain-swept hillsides. Graceful curves, comic asides and exquisite gradations of hallucinatory colour offer many pleasures along the way.

In *Evening View of the Eight Scenic Spots of Kanazawa in Musashi Province* (1857), one of the artist's last works, the landscape stretches across the triptych with the ease of a sleepy cat. Boat masts echo the pine trees that line the shore in delicate rhythms, white sails chime with a moon that looms dead centre, its pale presence etched by silhouettes of birds in flight, while arches of a bridge in the lower right echo the hills and mountains in the distance. Nature and civilisation are one. With its restaurateur soliciting business from passersby and the boats hovering in the vivid blue water, *Tōkaidō Autumn Moon: Restaurants at Kanagawa, Musashi Province* (*c.* 1839; Fig. 1) could be a scene reminiscent of a summer's night on a Cycladic island. The work was designed to be pasted over the bamboo ribs of an *uchiwa*, or fan. Most would be worn out and tossed aside, but about 600 of Hiroshige's survive, suggesting his fans were in high demand as a fashion accessory. That such a carefully made print was used for such a utilitarian purpose underlines the era's integration of beautiful things into everyday life.

Part way through the show, a vitrine displays the tools of the printmaker's trade – a woodblock and chisels – and the print that was made from that particular block, *Ferry on the Fuji River, Suruga Province* (1832). Videos and other tools nearby demonstrate how printmaking was a collective endeavour, involving the extraordinary skills of wood carver and printer, not to mention the relationship between artist and publisher.

Block-ready drawings (*hanshita-e*) by Hiroshige or any *ukiyo-e* artist were made in monochrome ink, glued to a woodblock and destroyed in the process of carving. A tripartite drawing by Hiroshige – of a crane, tit and oriole each on a blossoming branch – survives because it was never transformed into a print. It is remarkable to consider the thousands of drawings hacked up by the deft chisel of a carver, or *horishi*, testament to how the drawings were simply a means to an end: the print, the prized artefact.

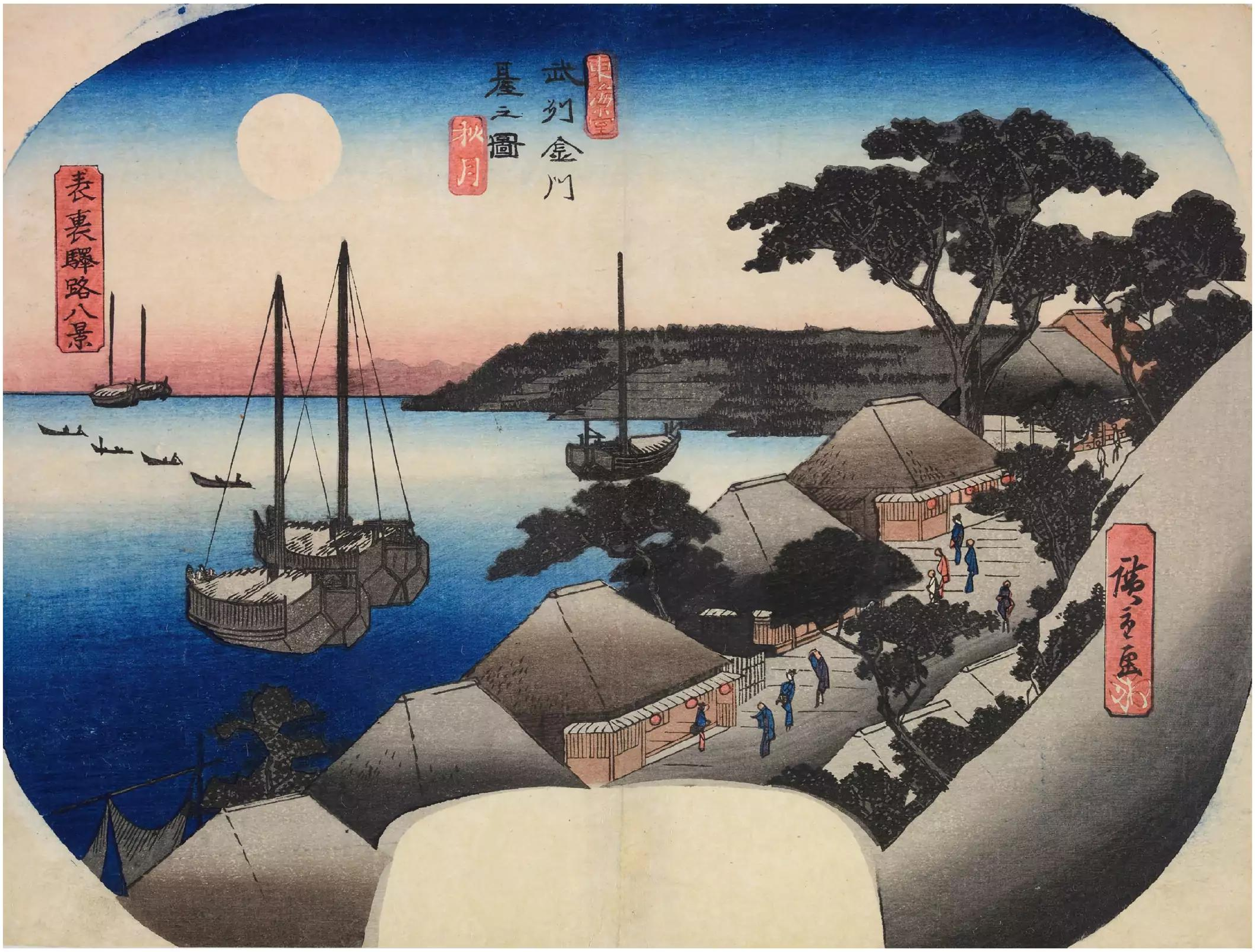
While the prints are punchy and beautiful, their form – dynamic, angular compositions and abundant empty spaces – might be demanding for many contemporary audiences. In a gallery called 'Nature all Around', devoted to the artist's *kachō hanga* (birds and flowers), birdsong and other nature sounds are piped into the galleries, a background din that bleeds through most of the show. It's an absurd conceit. 'Nature' is such a buzzword these days, as if everyone is afraid of art. A wall text describes *Arashiyama in Full Bloom* (*c.* 1834) as 'both realistic and inventively abstract'. Neither characterisation is helpful. The raftsmen float down the river as if on the milky way, while blossom-laden cherry trees burst like pink nebulae above a trail that snakes its way up the riverbank. *Arashiyama in Full Bloom* zings with playful, ecstatic joy. Hiroshige's vistas are scarcely 'realistic', even compared to a landscape by a European contemporary such as Gustave Courbet.

Instead of birdsong, not to mention a flat and unrewarding gallery devoted to artists influenced by Hiroshige, why not introduce objects from the British Museum's excellent collection of ceramics, screen paintings and lacquerware? (The catalogue is excellent, though it too emphasises the appreciation of individual prints.) Even a wider selection of *ukiyo-e* by other artists would offer more insight into Japanese aesthetics or bring the broader culture to life.

Hiroshige's work is rooted in a heightened awareness and celebration of 'the floating world' – the rituals of teahouses and theatres, of seasons and journeys. Yet visitors might feel adrift in a series of jewel-like impressions, isolated from a broader context. I overheard two people trying to understand why the *bijin*, or beautiful women, all looked identical, wondering whether they were meant to be portraits of specific people. Although I've lived in Japan and happened to have an inkling that tiny eyes and small mouths represent a conventional, idealised beauty not unlike the stylised lineaments of a neoclassical Aphrodite, I felt their frustration. The exhibition celebrates a gift of more than 30 prints from the collector Alan Medaugh, which might explain the emphasis on individual works. Perhaps it's a refreshing approach in an era of moralising and pedagogical overreach. But no one benefits from hearing recorded birdsong.

A generous silence reigns in the three-part print *Mountains and Streams of the Kiso Road* (1857). Snow-softened mountains occupy the pictorial space like fluffy pillows, their shadowy gorges lined with friendly pine trees. On the right side, the blue plunge of a waterfall frames a precarious path that hugs a ridge, above a narrow bridge, which leads into a steep trail up a ravine, each section replete with a lone traveller. On the far left, another bridge, another lone traveller. Is this the same figure that we follow through the mountains, or multiple pilgrims seeking the same destination? Either way, we fall under Hiroshige's spell as he takes us on a journey, cozy yet perilous, evoking an immensity of space in a diminutive triptych.

Craig Burnett spent a year teaching English in Yamaguchi-ken, Japan. He is the author of *Philip Guston: The Studio* (Afterall) and *The Lost Works of Johan Riding* (Mörel).


東海道
武州金川
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秋月
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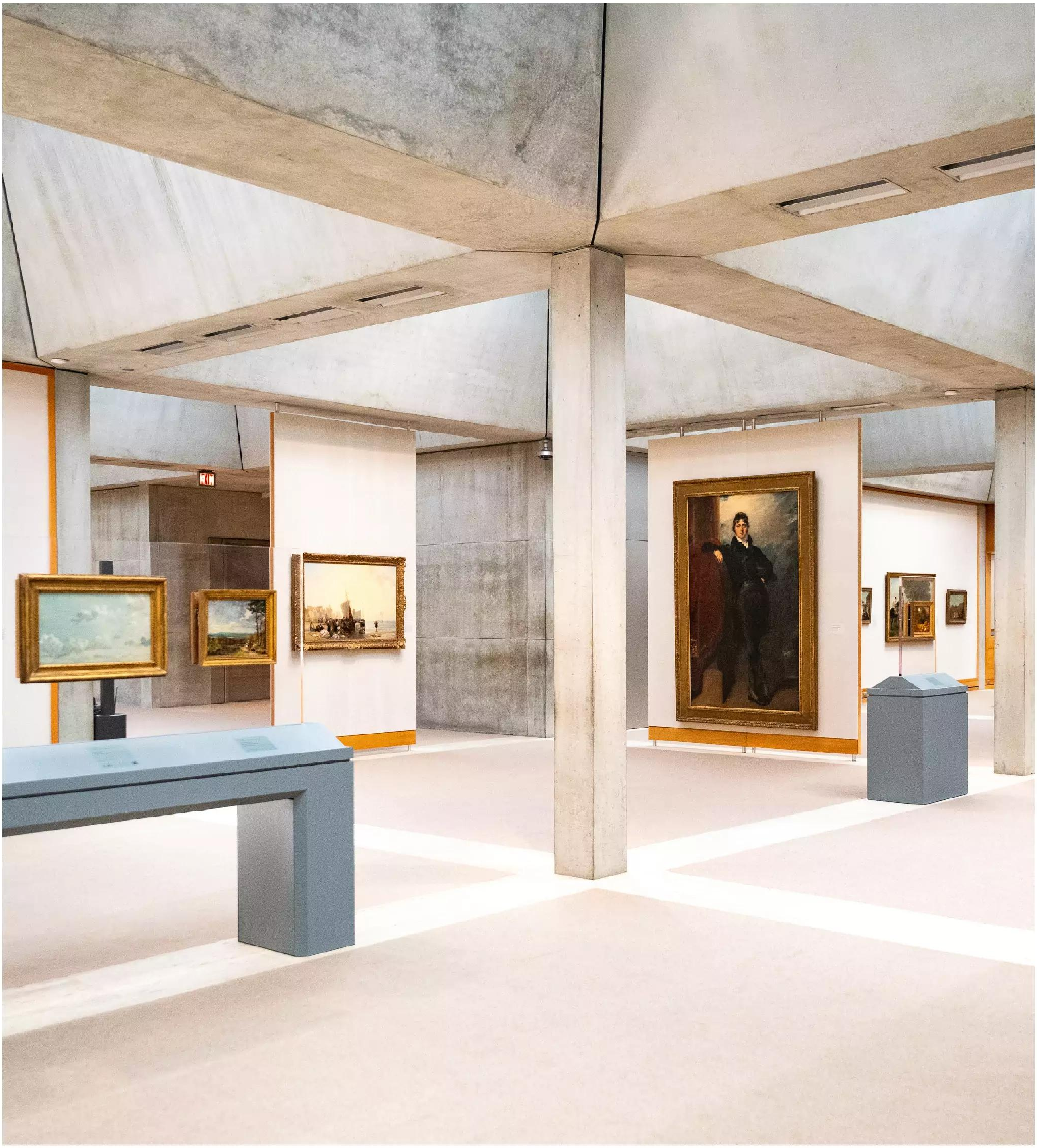
1. *Tōkaidō Autumn Moon: Restaurants at Kanagawa, Musashi Province*, *c.* 1839, Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), colour woodblock print, 22.2 × 29.3cm. Collection of Alan Medaugh, New York

Photo: © Alan Medaugh



1. A portrait of Lord Granville Leveson-Gower from 1804–09 by Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830) keeps company with works by Constable in a room on the fourth floor of Louis Kahn's 1977 building in New Haven

Photo: John Hassett; courtesy Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

Isles be back

***Morgan Falconer** on how the reopened Yale Center for British Art reframes Paul Mellon's collection*

**In a New Light:
Five Centuries of British Art**
29 March–ongoing
Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

Anthony Maria Browne, 2nd Viscount Montagu, is standing on a coastal cliff-top in Robert Peake the Elder's portrayal of *c.* 1590. Storm clouds shadow the land, his feet are planted amid snakes and toads and in the background buildings burn and ships sink. But he is unmoved: 'Rien m'estone,' says a motto alongside him, 'Nothing astounds me'. Montagu was a Catholic enduring the effects of the Elizabethan Religious Settlement, and he is troubled – 'oppressed' we might say today – and pushed to the edges of the country where it uncomfortably meets the world. He's the inspired opening blast in the reinstalled galleries of the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven – a figure for our time and his own.

The Yale Center was founded on the collection of Paul Mellon, the only son of financier and industrialist Andrew Mellon and his English wife Nora McMullen. Childhood summers spent in England made him a lifelong Anglophile, and he began collecting British art in earnest in the mid 1930s, starting with a Stubbs painting; the Yale Center was opened to display his bounty in 1977, in the home of his alma mater. The galleries are housed in Louis Kahn's very last building, an imposing lockbox of a structure, with an interior distantly echoing the courtyards and Great Halls of English country houses. They have been closed for two years for conservation work, but reopened in March with a newly reinstalled narrative of the nation's art, plus complementary shows dedicated to J.M.W. Turner and Tracey Emin.

The ensemble of exhibitions says much about Britain past and present and it does so at times ingeniously and poetically, at others with defensive insistence. The permanent collection display is titled 'In a New Light', but the introductory wall text touches on time-worn tropes of national decline and imperial adventuring followed by withdrawal and guilty unease. The galleries at Yale are arranged in an uninterrupted sequence of spaces arranged around the internal courtyard, so there is more flow than punctuation. The initial pictures tour us around ports and country houses and colonial outposts like Barbados; in the 18th century, the scene shifts briefly to London, then to Italianate spots on the Grand Tour; and the 19th century unfolds in a long gallery of windblown landscapes, with Henry Dawson's *London from Greenwich Hill* (1869–70) facing its Scottish rival in Alexander Nasmyth's *View of the City of Edinburgh* (*c.* 1822), and between them English scenes such as John Constable's *Stratford Mill* (1819–20).

With his love of the country's people and places, Mellon presumably had little desire to hold Britain to account for its crimes, yet this is work the pictures are called upon to do. And when the many charismatic and ebullient pictures won't behave – and mostly they won't – the curators deliver the sermons themselves in the wall texts. So, Thomas Beach's *Four Servants of Ston Easton Estate* (1776) would seem to provide a warm counterpoint to a sequence of stiffer aristocratic figures and properties, but the text emphasises that any comity we feel is merely an illusion in line with the landowner's 'conservative politics'. And in Jan Siberechts' view of Wollaton Hall in Nottingham (1697), the text directs us not to the charming naivety of the picture, with its persnickety detail and bungled perspective, but to the injustices of rich and poor. The problem isn't that any of this is wrong – the arguments are a true and necessary corrective to a history that once focused on style alone – but the spotlight on the structuring social conditions of the images becomes so insistent that it can seem to ignore the pictures themselves. With Trump rampaging across the United States intent on erasing these kinds of narratives of national decline and racial guilt, they can start to look less like viewpoints and more like defensive ramparts dug down on any soil that will hold them.

The historical sequence comes to a close via some melancholy portraits from the early 20th century, and finally we arrive at a conclusion with a picture from 2010, a fine, smouldering painting of a Black figure by Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. We're to understand that our time shall be his. One might see a similar logic guiding the inclusion of Tracey Emin's female figures in the exhibition 'I Loved You Until The Morning'. But here the mood is shadowy, and the crowded social world of the historical pictures drops away, leaving pain, loneliness and transactional relationships. Emin channels Twombly, Schiele and de Kooning for grand, operatic effect, but it rarely feels persuasive. Americans have long been immune to Emin's charms, despite her extraordinary self-advertisement in the nation's art press, and this marks her first museum show in the country, but it isn't likely to convince anyone that they've been missing out.

A more reliable, doughty old crowd-pleaser is Turner and, happily, the Yale Center possesses the greatest collection of his pictures outside the UK, all the better to celebrate 250 years since the curmudgeon's death. Here, the country isn't in the dock and the mood is lighter, the pictures filled with more places than people. The theme of the show, and the title, is 'Romance and Reality', and that could subtitle the arguments running throughout Yale Center's rehang. 'In a New Light' leans into reality and tends to reinforce the perception of Brits as brass-tacks folks, not given to flights of fancy, but Turner's pictures remind us that fantasy can spring from the buffeting of that most disorientating British experience, the weather. Among the surprises is a spectacularly bizarre scene, not by Turner but by Robert Carrick, who assembled a series of prints documenting the progressive stages of his work on a popular chromolithograph of 1852 based on the master's *Rockets and Blue Lights* (1840). In the early 19th century, flares were often used to warn ships of danger, and here the practice becomes the basis for a hallucinatory landscape of fire, wind, smoke and pouring water. It's no place for the faint-hearted, but then neither is contemporary Britain in these interesting times.

Morgan Falconer's most recent book, *How to Be Avant-Garde*, is published by W.W. Norton.

The next chapter

Revisiting a meeting of two Surrealists sheds new light on the wider movement, writes ***Rachel Cohen***

Frida Kahlo's Month in Paris: A Friendship with Mary Reynolds
29 March–13 July
Art Institute of Chicago

Catalogue by Caitlin Haskell, Tamar Kharatishvili, Alivé Piliado Santana (eds.)
ISBN 9780300279665 (hardback), $30
(Art Institute of Chicago)

Frida Kahlo went to Paris in January 1939 at the invitation of André Breton, who wanted to put on an exhibition of her work and of Mexican work more generally. Kahlo wrote scathing and hilarious letters about Breton and the disorganisation and squalor of his household, which she partially blamed when almost immediately she became ill and had to be hospitalised. The situation was redeemed by the appearance of a warm and gracious American woman: Mary Reynolds.

Minnesota-born Reynolds had by then been living in Paris for some 18 years; she insisted Kahlo recover at the home she shared with Marcel Duchamp, full of friends (Jean Cocteau, Alexander Calder, Constantin Brancusi) and their works of art. Reynolds's collection of earrings hung in pairs along the walls; Duchamp's room was layered in road maps; and the garden's marble Brancusi presided over nightly dinner parties. Thus began an entirely different stay for Frida Kahlo, one subject of this stellar exhibition, 'Frida Kahlo's Month in Paris: A Friendship with Mary Reynolds'.

Mary Reynolds was a private artist, who worked in the medium of book-binding, *reliure*, to create sculpture-books that extended the meanings of the books they contained with exquisite sensitivity, piercing wit, and materials now troubling (goatskin, toadskin, ostrich). The 32 works exhibited are by far the most Reynolds ever shown in one place. Curator Caitlin Haskell writes in the catalogue: 'a binder of books, Reynolds was also a binder of community'. Seeing the work of Reynolds and Kahlo among that of their peers creates a new understanding of their work, and of Surrealism in a critical moment before the Second World War.

Both the exhibition and the catalogue have been designed to suggest what germinated in that month's visit. At each end of the museum show, there is a small room, and these are bound together by a long central gallery; the exhibition is itself book-ended by arrival and departure. In the first room we can see Kahlo (recently emerged from the shadow of her more famous husband Diego Rivera), already painting with the authority and textured clarity that impressed not only the Surrealists, but also French museums. In this room is *The Frame* (1938), Kahlo's self-portrait on aluminum in an artisanal frame of painted glass, which was acquired for the Jeu de Paume. We also see Mary Reynolds, in photographs taken of her by Man Ray and in perhaps the best-known work she made herself, *Les mains libres* (free hands). This is a bound book in brown goatskin that has on its cover the witty overlay of a pair of brown leather gloves stitched on and flat, so that the gloves appear to be hands holding the book, at once free and bound. The pages within are a book of drawings by Man Ray with poems by Paul Éluard and the layers of collaboration, welcome and disparition embodied in those gloved and absent hands make the object a fitting emblem of the exhibition as a whole.

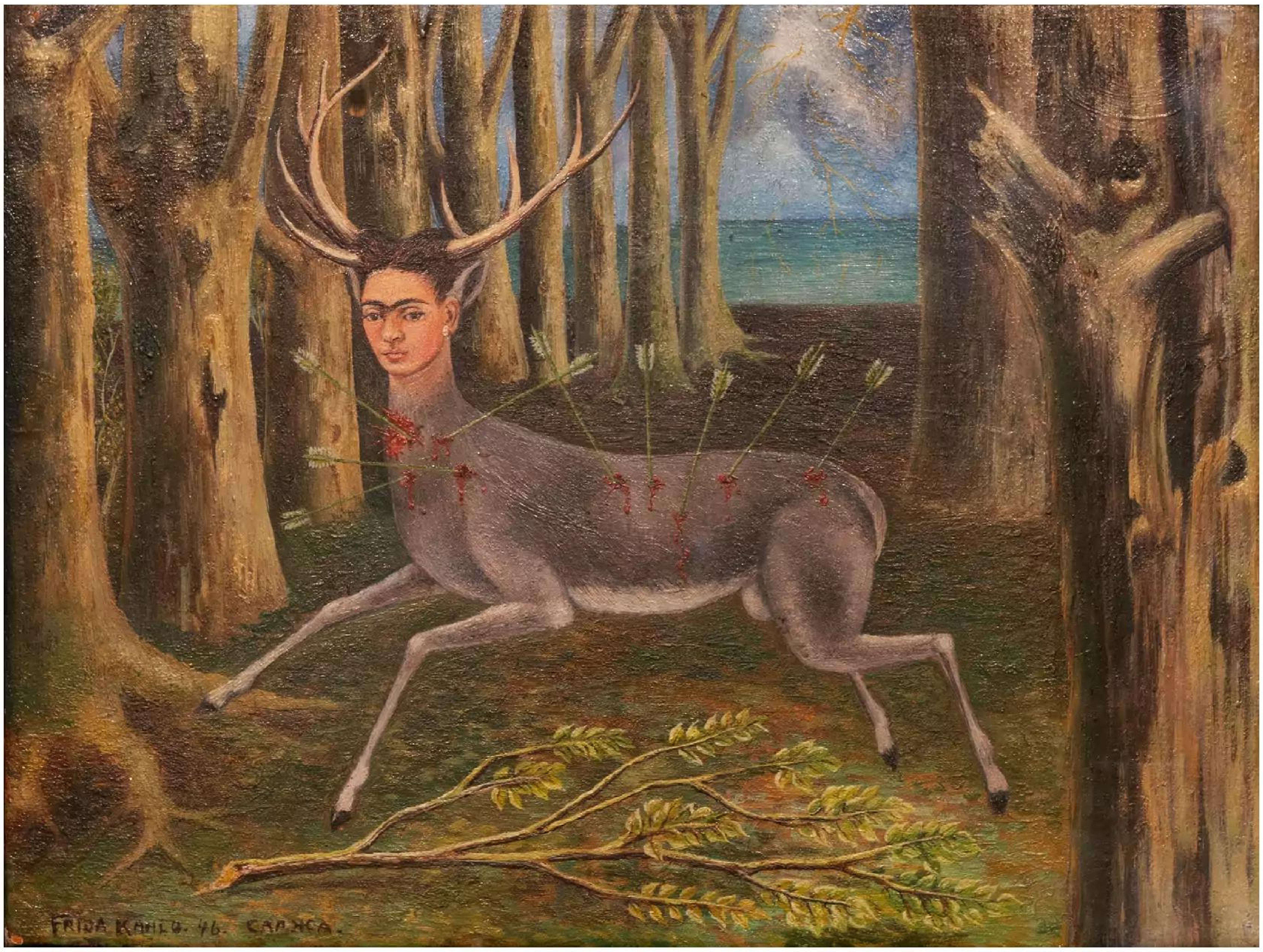
The meeting of Kahlo and Reynolds is a crucial knot in a net of Surrealist artists that includes Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, Mina Loy, Gertrude Abercrombie, Lola Álvarez Bravo, perhaps even Lenore Tawney and Ruth Asawa. In the work of these artists, people, animals, plants, and even books and works of art have a living presence. Thin and cutting filaments do not break figures down into geometric objects; even when figures suffer, they are still seers.

A view of a wider, more various Surrealism opens out in the long vitrined gallery at the Art Institute. I am not sure I have ever been in a clearer space of historical consideration. The vitrines are waist-high along counters that are austere invocations of shelves and of a central gathering table. Here is Reynolds's thinking: a thermometer down the spine of Raymond Queneau's *Un rude hiver (A Hard Winter)*; blood-red slashes along that of Jean Desbordes's *The True Face of the Marquis de Sade* (Fig. 2); cosmic starry endpapers for Cocteau and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry; dappled leather and ferned insects for Duchamp and Éluard. In the context of these sharp lines and thin layers of vegetation and skin, *The Wounded Deer* (1946) – a small Kahlo painting in which a deer with the artist's face is pierced with arrows – becomes less an iconic, isolated face, more a fantastic study of pain and paint (Fig. 1). Here, too, are works by Brancusi, Calder, Joseph Cornell, Duchamp, Cocteau, Yves Tanguy and others; the dead seem to be calling to one another via their address books, letters, drawings with intimate dedications, small paintings, lofty sculptures, paper collages and borrowed patterns.

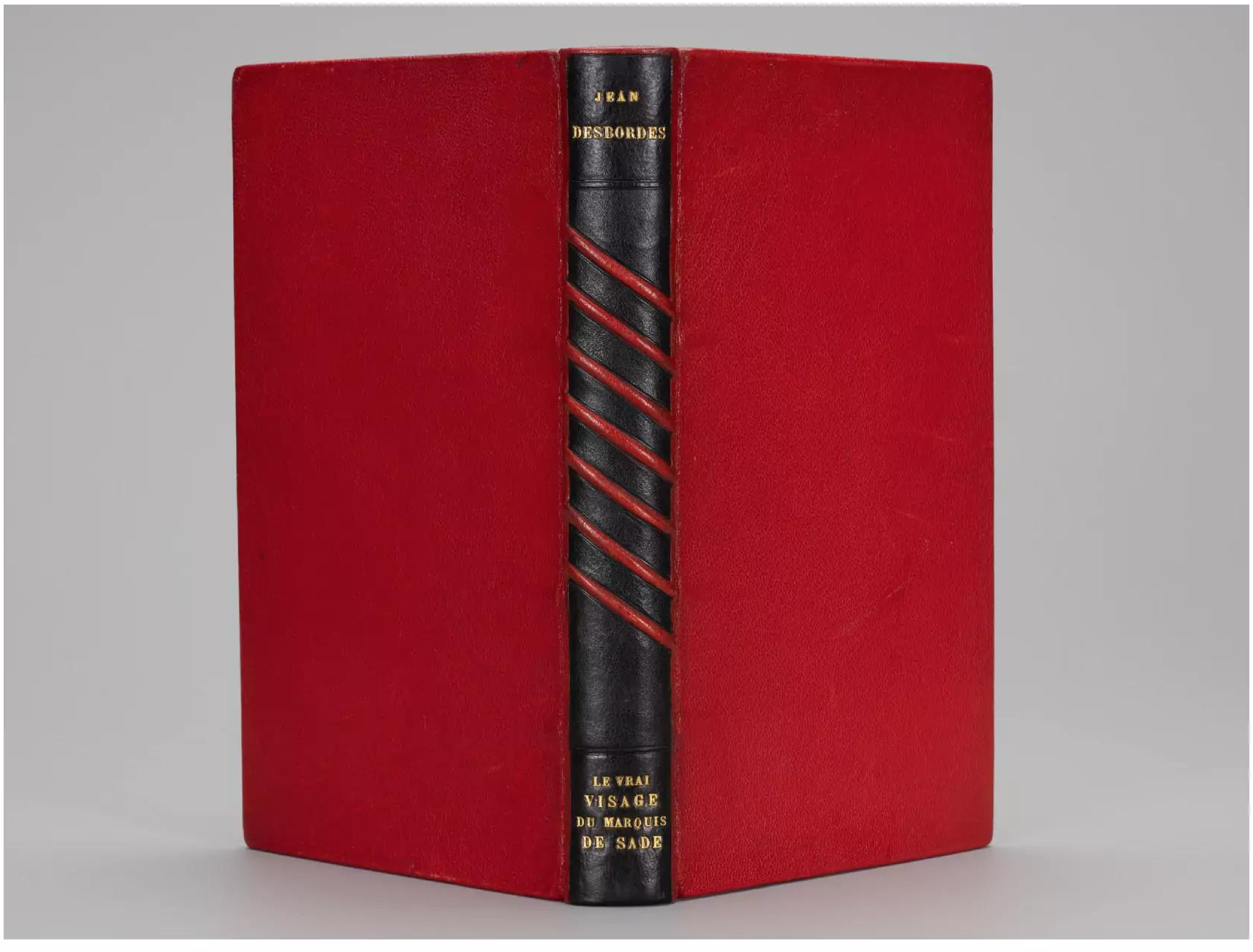
At the central table, people paused to page through copies of the show's catalogue, itself an art object. Edited by Haskell with Tamar Kharatishvili and Alivé Piliado Santana, it includes Haskell's wonderfully inventive essay 'Frida Kahlo and Mary Reynolds: A Surrealist Drama in Five Acts', followed by a theatrical 'cast of characters', and the pages for the exhibition objects laid out with feeling exactitude across the pages: a book (which can travel) inside an exhibition (which won't) about how books may hold the meaning of artistic movements.

The exhibition's last room, of departures, tells of the eventual show, 'Mexique', and of how Kahlo's work made more than one lasting mark. Many of the Surrealists would follow her to Mexico, where she and Rivera helped them to get papers and places to stay. At the centre of this room is an edition of Duchamp's *Box in a Valise*, the suitcase ready for flight, containing his works in miniatures Mary Reynolds helped fashion. Reynolds's escape from France in 1942 became the stuff of legend, but her sculpture-books already understood a great deal about flight, cruelty and incisive lines. On the last wall is the drawing Duchamp created as the bookplate for the Reynolds collection that, after her death in 1950, found its home at the Art Institute of Chicago. His line drawing of her profile looks like a Cocteau, with bold earrings fashioned out of her twined initials: M R.

Rachel Cohen's first book, *A Chance Meeting: American Encounters*, was recently reissued by NYRB Classics.


FRIDA KAHLO. 46. CARACA.

1. *The Wounded Deer (La venadita)*, 1946, Frida Kahlo (1907–54), oil on hardboard, 22.4 × 30cm. Private collection


JEAN
DESBORDES
LE VRAI
VISAGE
DU MARQUIS
DE SADE

2. *Le vrai visage du Marquis de Sade (The True Face of the Marquis de Sade)* by Jean Desbordes, 1939–42/1945–50, Mary Reynolds (1891–1950), full goatskin with calfskin inlays, diagonal false bands on spine, and gold stamping, black endpapers and black-painted top edge, 21.1 × 13.1 x 3cm. Art Institute of Chicago

Photo: © 2025 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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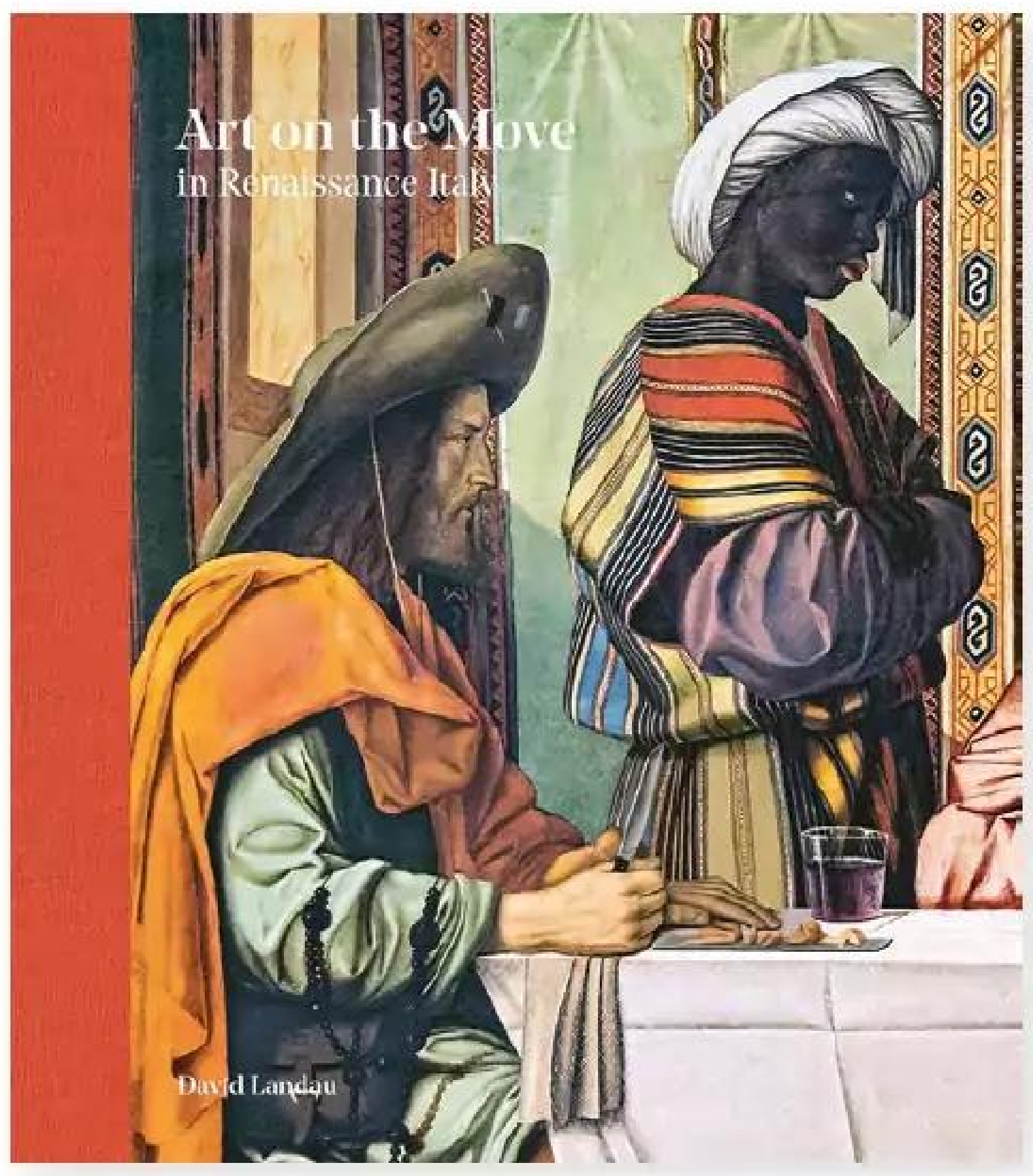
Off the shelf

Apollo's selection of recently published books on art, architecture and the history of collecting


Art on the Move
in Renaissance Italy
David Landau

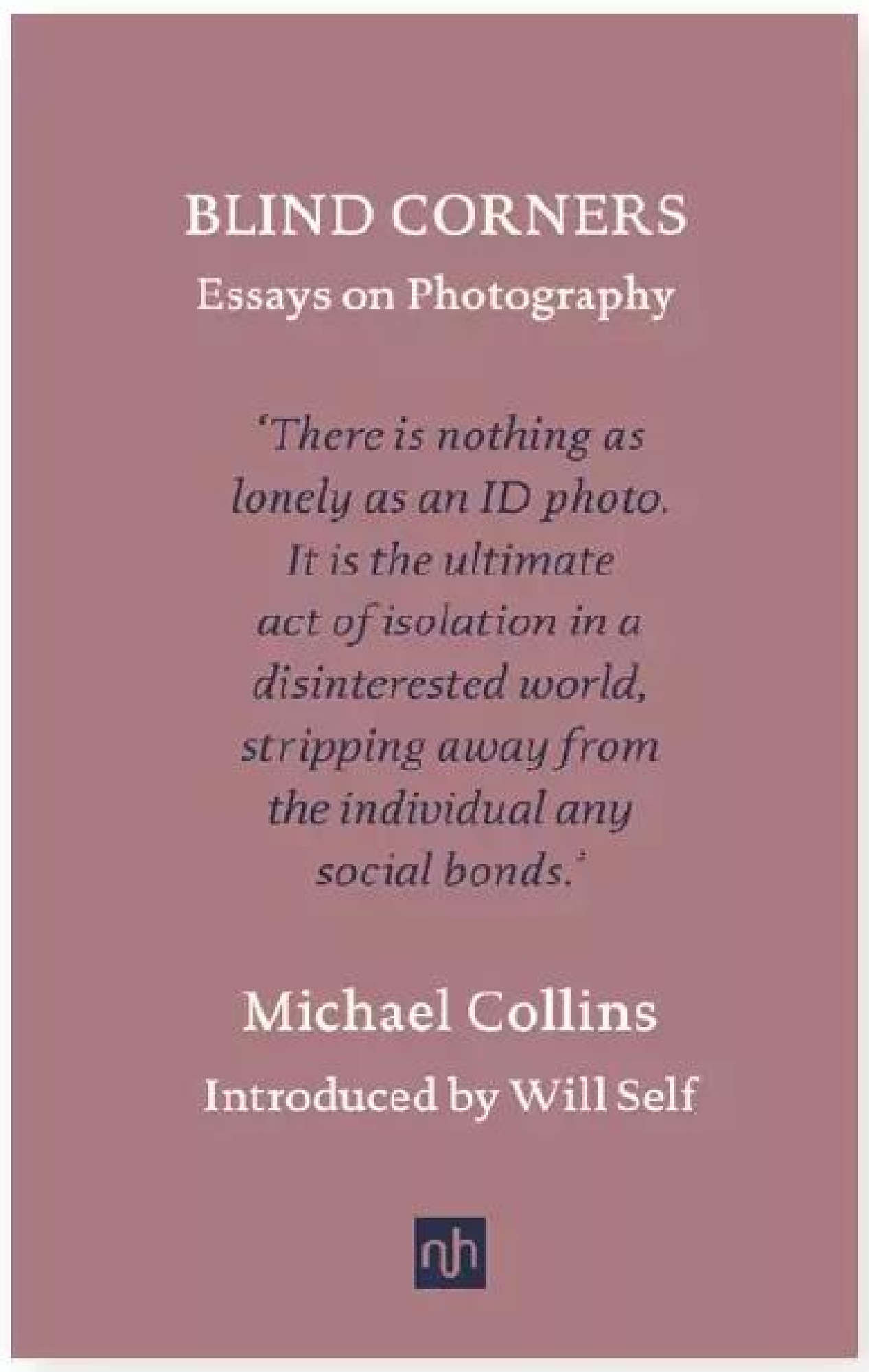
Art on the Move in Renaissance Italy
David Landau
Ad Ilissum, £50
ISBN 9781915401168

Taking 1506 as the zenith of the High Renaissance, Landau argues that the extent to which artists, works and ideas moved to, from, through and around Italy has been underplayed. Here he mines archival material, from receipts to artists' letters, to paint a lively picture of the period.

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE

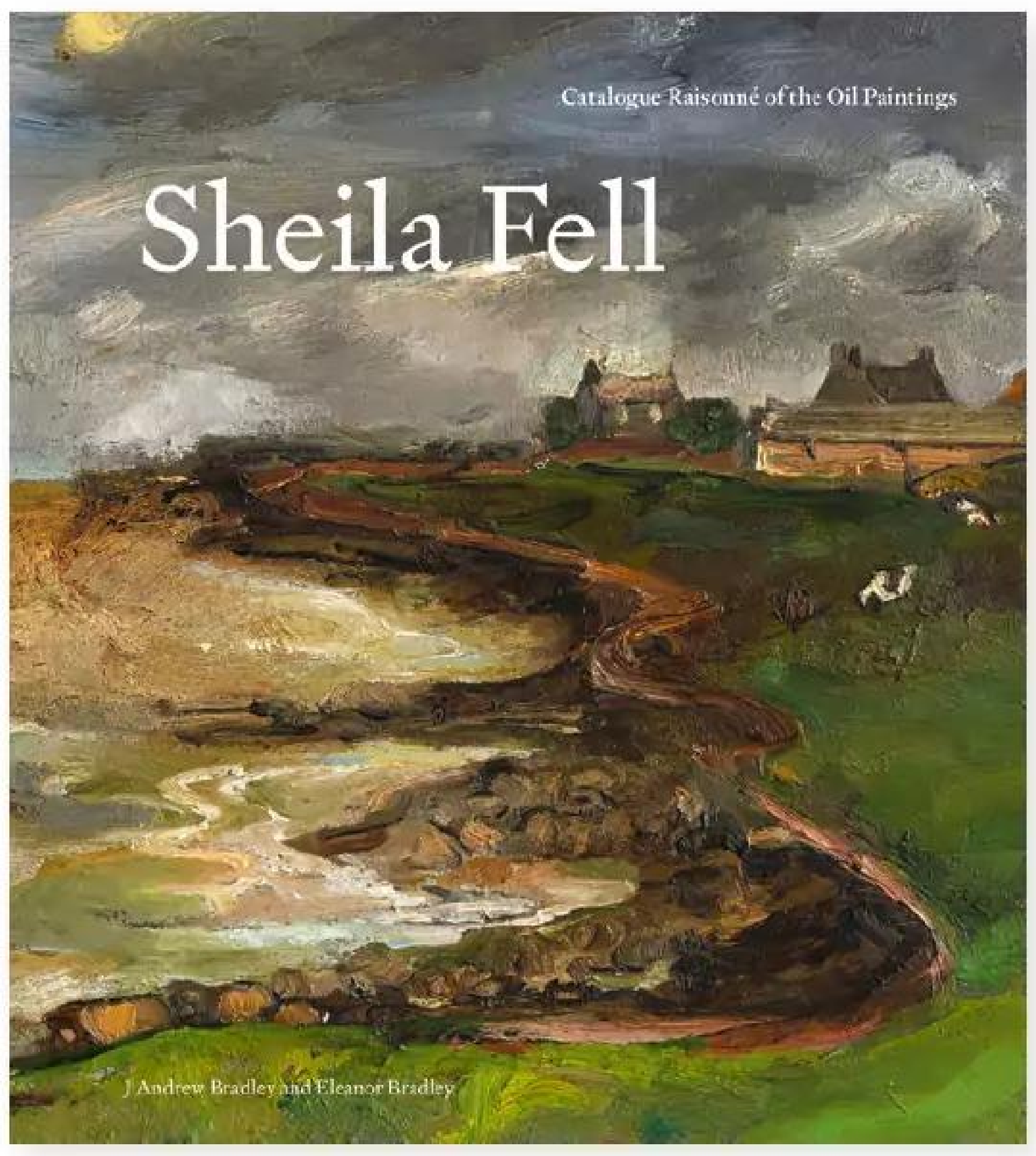
William Kentridge:
Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot
William Kentridge; edited by Karen Marta
Hauser & Wirth Publishers, £90
ISBN 9783907493120

For those intrigued by Kentridge's nine-part film series, *Self-Portrait as a Coffee-Pot* (2024), the artist has now given it book form. Portraits, studio shots and illustrations of works are interspersed with transcriptions of the artist's offbeat dialogue with himself.


BLIND CORNERS
Essays on Photography
'There is nothing as lonely as an ID photo. It is the ultimate act of isolation in a disinterested world, stripping away from the individual any social bonds.'
Michael Collins
Introduced by Will Self

Blind Corners: Essays on Photography
Michael Collins
Notting Hill Editions, £15.99
ISBN 9781912559657

It is photography's realism, writes Collins, that makes it 'the most accessible, understandable and credible of all visual arts' – but perhaps only on the surface. This pithy book encourages us to look more closely to tap into 'the optical unconscious'.


Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil Paintings
Sheila Fell
J. Andrew Bradley and Eleanor Bradley

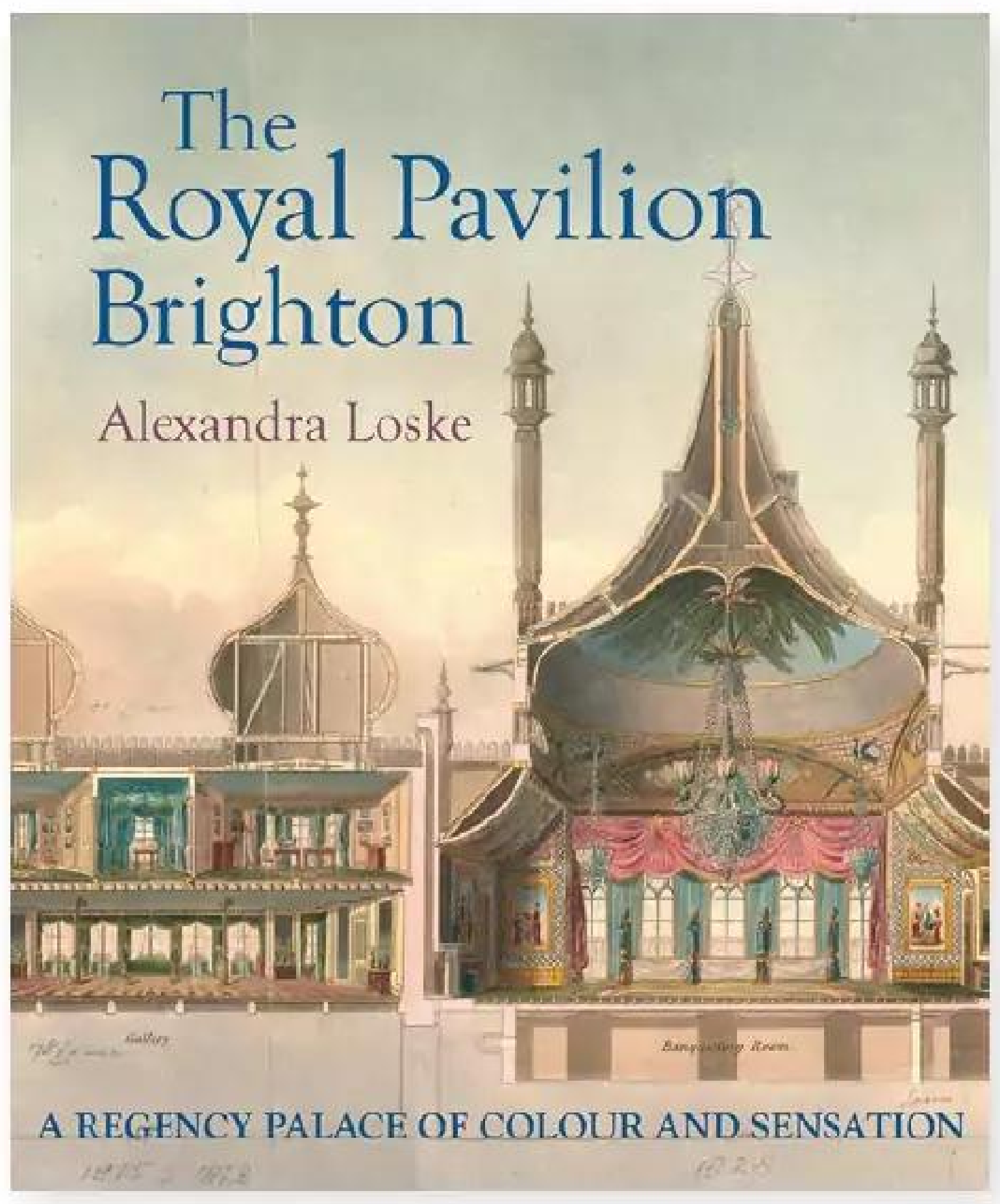
Sheila Fell: Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil Paintings
J. Andrew Bradley and Eleanor Bradley
Lund Humphries, £195
ISBN 9781848226326

The majority of the 20th-century artist's works depict the Cumbrian landscape. That specificity may be partly to blame for her lack of critical attention but, as this book shows, it is also what gives her paintings their earthy, evocative quality.

RICHARD ORMOND
John Singer Sargent
The Charcoal Portraits

John Singer Sargent:
The Charcoal Portraits
Richard Ormond
Paul Mellon Centre, £65
ISBN 9781913107468

Sargent is, of course, best known for his painted portraits but, as Ormond writes, he was 'a compulsive draughtsman since his earliest youth'. This catalogue of his charcoals is accompanied by commentary that draws on the artist's letters and diaries.

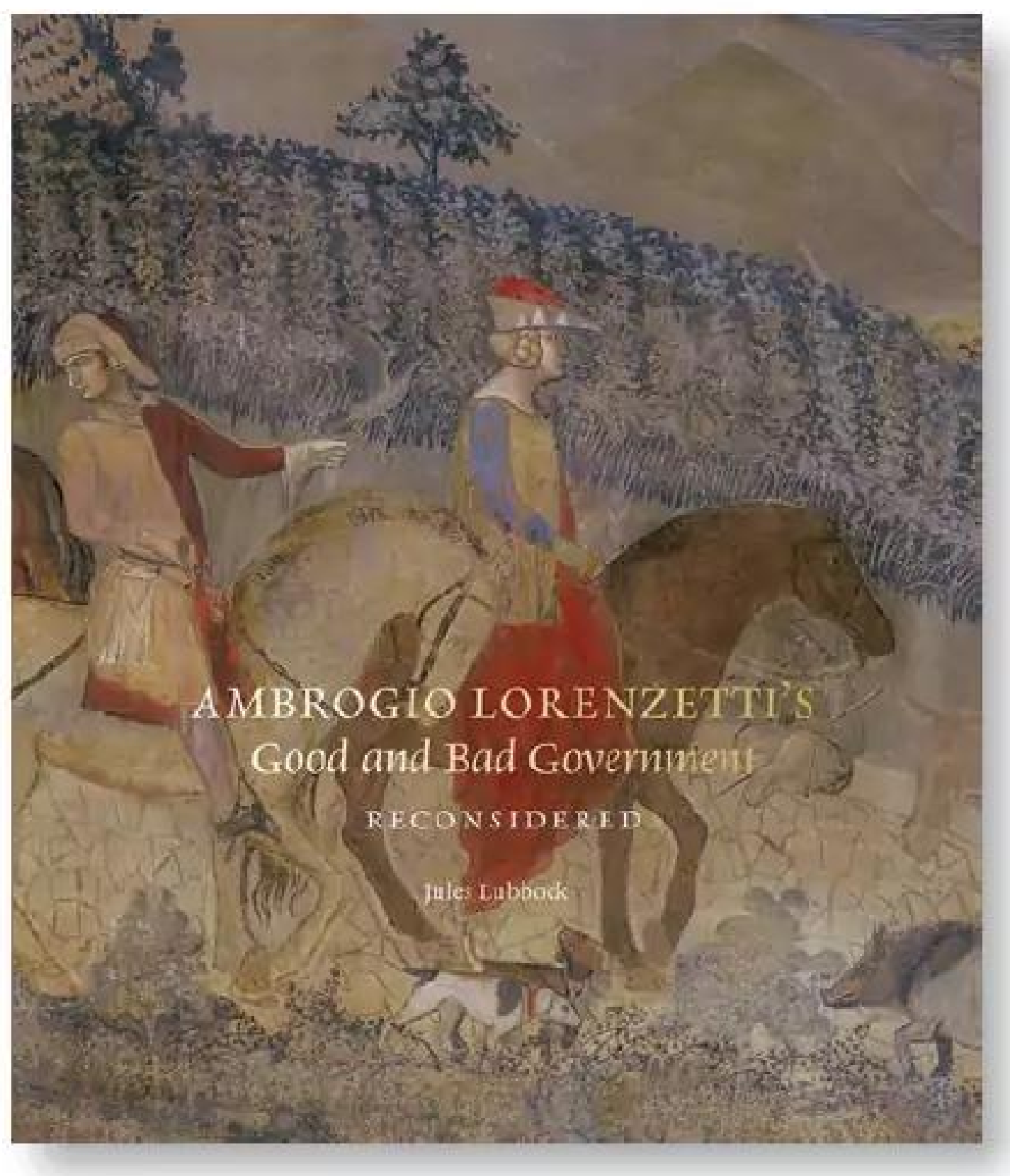

The Royal Pavilion Brighton
Alexandra Loske
A REGENCY PALACE OF COLOUR AND SENSATION

The Royal Pavilion, Brighton: A Regency Palace of Colour and Sensation
Alexandra Loske
Yale University Press, £35
ISBN 9780300266665

The Royal Pavilion sticks out among the architecture of Brighton but it has also become the city's most famous emblem. Loske's handsomely illustrated study focuses on its creation, led by George IV, and the extraordinary chinoiserie-laden interior.

Virtue and vice

One of history's most mysterious paintings holds lessons for our own time, writes ***Imogen Tedbury***



Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Good and Bad Government Reconsidered
Jules Lubbock
Ad Ilissum, £50
ISBN 9781915401137

From 1292 to 1355, the prosperous city of Siena was governed by an elected council known as the Nine. Appointed for two months at a time, this group of men lived in the Palazzo Pubblico. They ate together, slept together, ruled together – and, in 1338, commissioned from leading painter Ambrogio Lorenzetti a series of three extraordinary murals to adorn the Sala della Pace (Room of Peace), where they oversaw the business of state.

In this room, on facing walls, Ambrogio painted two sweeping panoramas that illustrate the Good Commune and the Tyrannical Commune, presenting alternative fates for Siena and its territories. The first is a peaceful, bustling scene of everyday life, full of gorgeously observed detail – a woman watering her flowers, a pig driven to market, shoemakers, dancers, builders – while its dystopian opposite is a scene of violence, cruelty and neglect, with its crumbling buildings, uncultivated fields and communities ravaged by flames. Between these two stark visions, on the wall behind the door through which the Nine would have entered, an Allegory of Good Government presents Justice enthroned (Fig. 1). Two intertwining cords from her scales pass through the hands of 24 citizens to the sceptre of a monumental figure representing the Sienese Commune, who sits on a bench surrounded by the personified virtues.

These three paintings, known today as the *Allegory of Good and Bad Government*, were in their time unique as political works of art on such a large scale. They remain one of the most extraordinary enigmas in the history of art and their purpose, function and contemporary reception remain elusive. In this new study, Jules Lubbock presents his thesis for their making and meaning, the considered results of a career of close looking, discussion, intrigue and delight, grounded in careful attention to textual and visual sources.

In the past, Ambrogio's frescoes have often been interpreted as a painted treatise on government. Attempts have been made to translate Ambrogio's images into words, to reconstruct a lost brief that might illuminate the Nine's political theories. Even those who focus on the images for their own sake have inevitably interpreted them within a political framework, and seen these images as by turns a celebration of the Nine's success and a warning of what might happen without their wise rule. Here, Lubbock attempts to foreground the paintings, confining his account of Siena's governance to an appendix and instead beginning with a discussion of the paintings' unusual design.

For Lubbock, the lack of central focal point in Ambrogio's asymmetrical compositions underpins a message that is deliberately more cautionary and 'less smug and jingoistic than at first sight'. Here, he contends, Ambrogio argues for the precarity of government, whose ability to govern justly relies not only on Wisdom, Peace and Fortitude, but also, crucially, the willing and continued participation of its citizens. A new translation and analysis of the 14-stanza poem inscribed on the frescoes themselves, known as the *Canzone*, concludes that Ambrogio was commissioned to create a scheme that would glorify justice and illustrate the specific stages by which justice operates to better a state, but that it was Ambrogio himself who chose which parts of the text to emphasise in his images, akin to the setting of words to music: 'some words are intended to be heard distinctly, others are lost in the polyphony.'

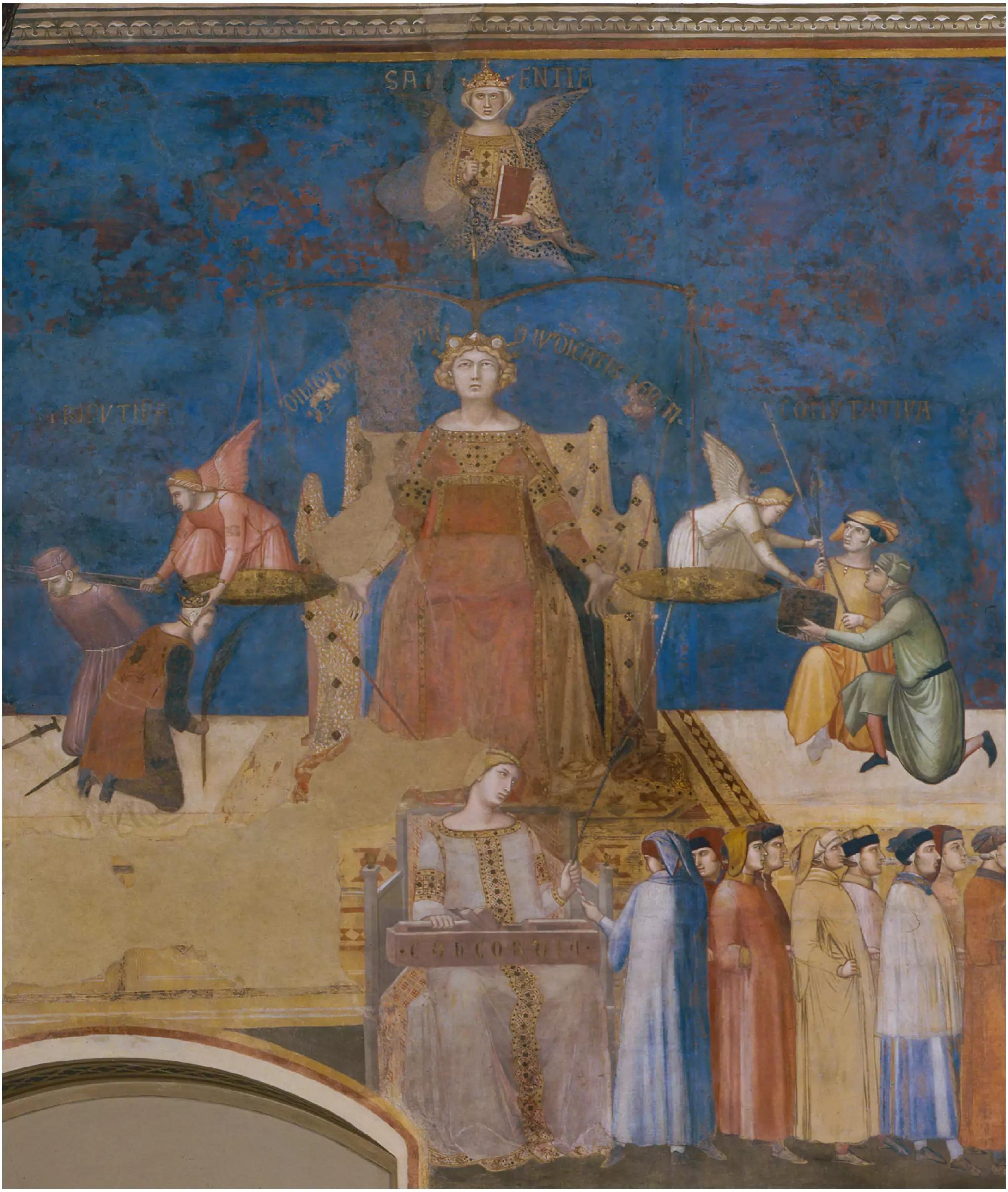
Lubbock teases out a thought-provoking and original interpretation of Ambrogio's work, arguing that the painter deliberately questions the 'boom-town optimism' of 1330s Siena. Instead, Ambrogio presents an image of a government that rules by force and survives through consent, and an image of a state that remains peaceful only under surveillance and threat. In the countryside, a beggar sits by the side of the road, ignored by a mounted huntress. Riders disappear down backstreets – innocent or up to no good? Even the dancers who enact harmony are joined through fragile connection: they do not hold each other by the hand but by the joint of the little finger.

In the past, interpretations of Ambrogio's masterwork have inevitably reflected the political ideals of their time, with the Nine often heralded as a proto-democracy or republic. In the mid 20th century, scholars found parallels between the Nine and the emergence of their own liberal democracies. Lubbock, however, sees this government as 'a collective tyranny', self-selected from a small group of the richest citizens. Here, the Nine is recast as a 'collective dictatorship of "billionaire" bankers and international merchants' – an interpretation that is entirely justified but reflects our own troubled times as much as a post-war scholar's view reflected theirs.

Just as Ambrogio's frescoes reward different levels of interpretation, this book can be appreciated by the general reader as much as the scholar. There are assured analyses of approaches to image-making as well as of the images themselves; the deliberate illusionism inherent in the fleeting positions of figures and architecture is persuasively connected to 14th-century theories about the deceptiveness of images. There are also moments that will be provocative to some, such as the identification of five very precise – but hypothetical – stages in Ambrogio's design process, or an unexpected sojourn into the shady world of espionage under the Nine, where 'painting was an excellent cover for spying'. (Lubbock wonders if Ambrogio engaged in the practice.)

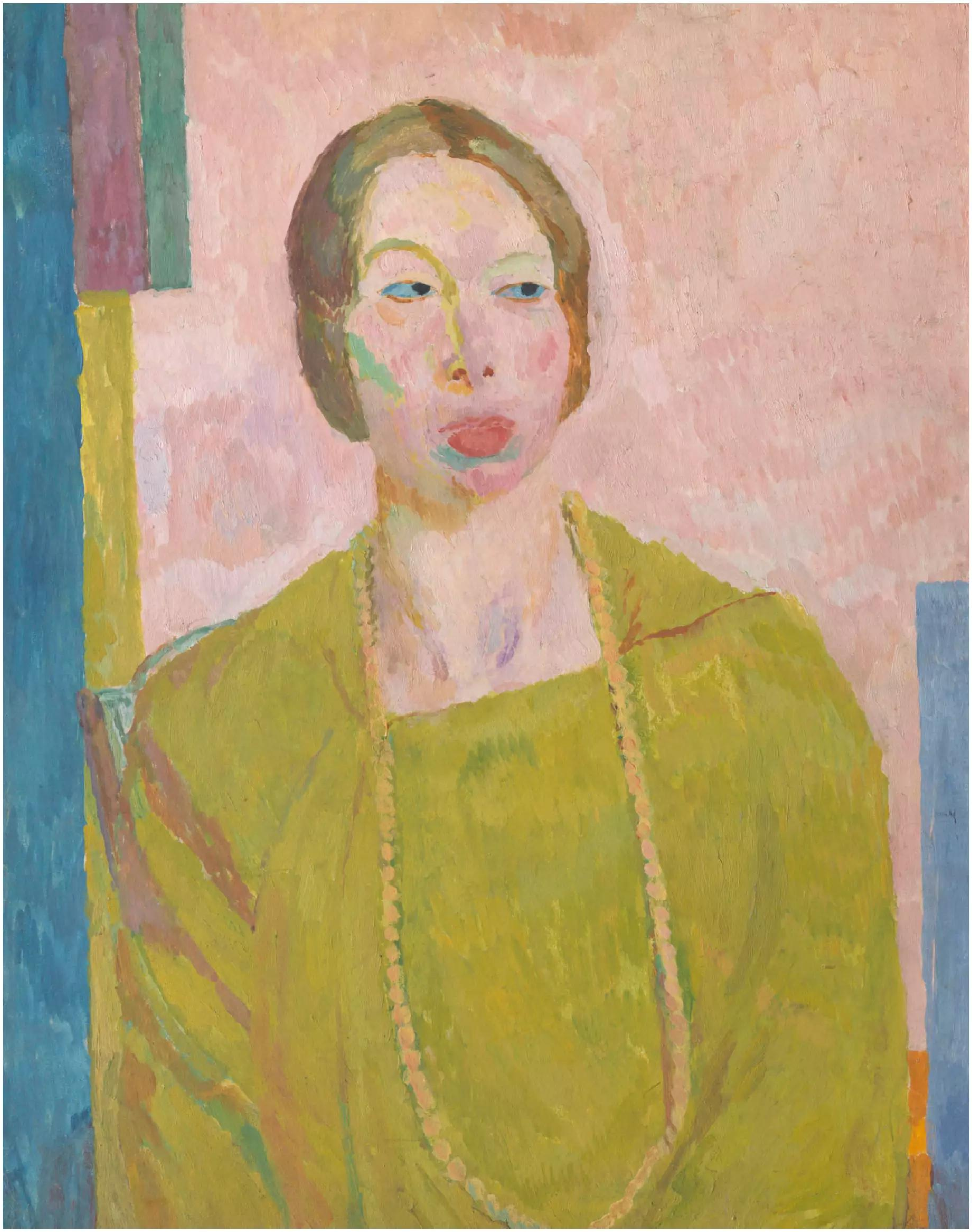
It is to be hoped that this book is made available in the Palazzo Pubblico and that a future edition might update its already beautiful illustrations with new photography, when the restoration of Ambrogio's paintings currently underway in the Sala della Pace is complete. This proposal for Ambrogio's paintings as images of an uncertain, precarious world, where stability is maintained through both consensus and the not-so-hidden threat of violence, is fit for our own time.

Imogen Tedbury is cataloguing the earlier Italian paintings at the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, with Nicholas Penny.



1. The wall of Good Government from *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* (1338) by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (d. 1348?) in the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena. This detail shows Justice enthroned, with Wisdom, Concord and the first of the 24 citizens

Photo: © Antonio Quattrone

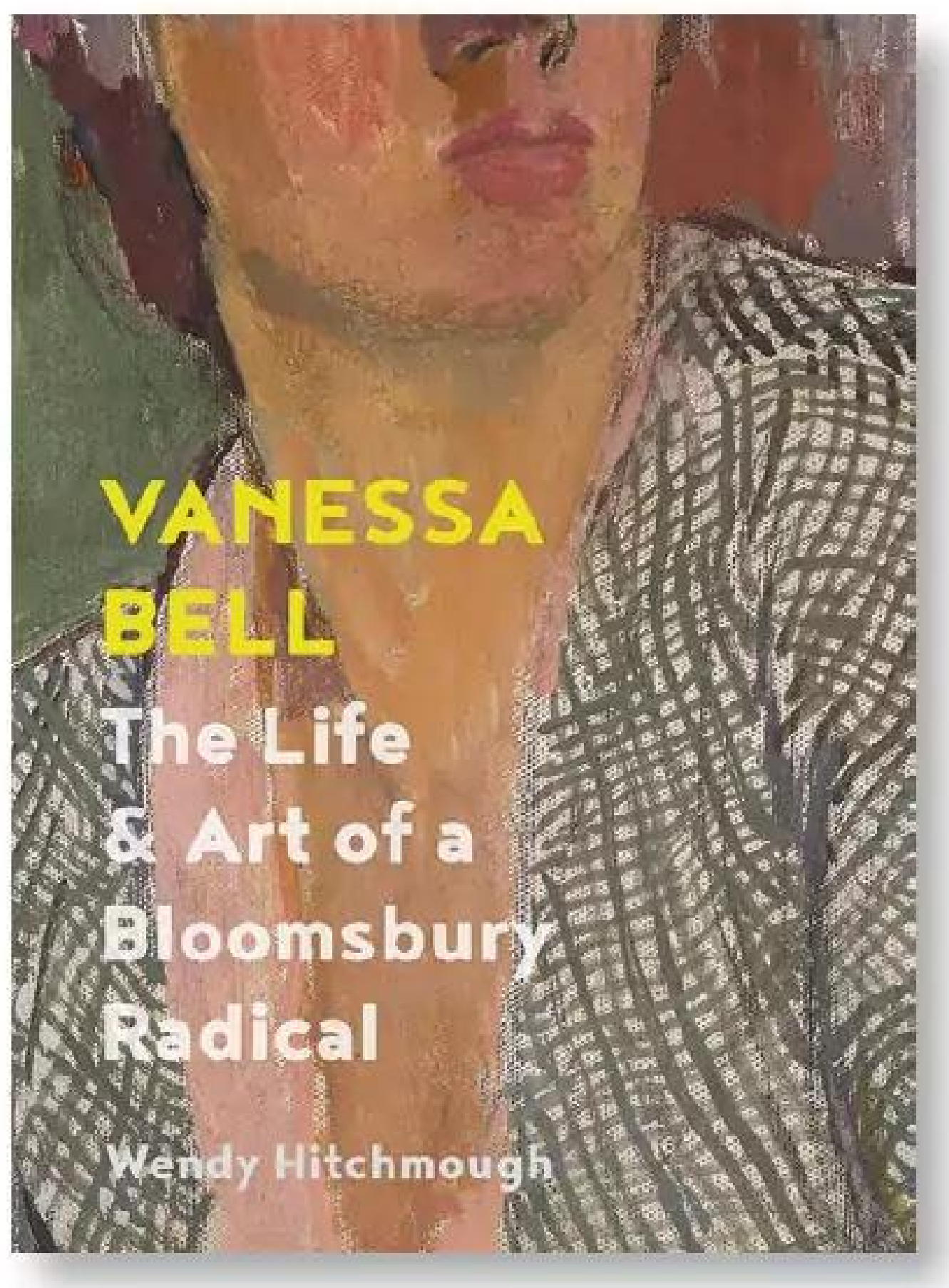


1. *Mrs St John Hutchinson*, *c*. 1915, Vanessa Bell (1879–1961), oil on board, 73.7 × 57.8cm. Tate, London

Photo: © Tate; © Estate of Vanessa Bell. All rights reserved, DACS 2024; currently on display at Tate St Ives

Her story

At last, Vanessa Bell is being recognised as a pioneering modernist, writes ***Emily Cox***



Vanessa Bell: The Life and Art of a Bloomsbury Radical
Wendy Hitchmough
Yale University Press, £30
ISBN 9780300269215

In 1916, Vanessa Bell moved to Sussex with her lover Duncan Grant, his lover David Garnett and the two sons she had by her husband, Clive, who paid visits to the unconventional ménage with his latest flame, Mary, in tow (Fig. 1). Before she got down to decorating the dilapidated farmhouse known as Charleston, she wrote to her faithful correspondent (and just-jilted paramour), the art critic Roger Fry: 'It will be an odd life, won't it, but it seems to me it ought to be a good one for painting.'

Wendy Hitchmough tests that wager, introducing us to the work of a woman who has never quite escaped second-billing in the Bloomsbury Group. A painter in a world of writers, Bell's reputation has long rested on the especially quotable prose of her sister, Virginia Woolf, about whom she complained, in 1910: 'Virginia since early youth has made it her business to create a character for me according to her wishes & has now […] succeeded in imposing it on the whole world.' This timely monograph, arriving in anticipation of Tate Britain's exhibition 'Vanessa Bell & Duncan Grant' next year, gives the pen – or rather, the brush – back to a painter who admitted that she couldn't 'write art criticism' at a time when her friends did. Though the letters quoted throughout the book show that Vanessa was rarely at a loss for words, Hitchmough contends that the artist's most compelling arguments were made 'in paint'.

Bell, née Stephen, moved to Bloomsbury from Hyde Park in 1904. At 22 Hyde Park Gate, she was a scion of the 19th century's artistic and intellectual elite, the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, a biographer, and Julia Duckworth, favoured muse of painters such as Edward Burne-Jones and George Frederic Watts. When her stepsister Stella died soon after their mother, Vanessa assumed the domestic duties typical of a woman of her rank, if not her age. She split her time between balancing the books at home and taking life-drawing classes at local academies. When Leslie Stephen died, it was without remorse that Vanessa sold the house and furniture and took rooms in a district home to suffragettes and socialists, but she kept the five large-format photographs of her mother taken by her great aunt Julia Margaret Cameron and hung them in the vestibule. It was an early indicator that Bloomsbury would never quite shake the Victorian inheritance it claimed to abhor.

At 46 Gordon Square, Vanessa made a craft out of the domestic drudgery into which she had been initiated at Hyde Park Gate. What Hitchmough calls her 'invisible labour' – arranging rooms, ordering dinners and mailing invitations – brought into contact figures who would each be credited for modernising their respective fields: the economist John Maynard Keynes, the art historian Roger Fry, and the painter (and Vanessa's lifelong collaborator) Duncan Grant. Hitchmough celebrates Vanessa as a 'place maker', a bland rebranding of the more familiar 'home maker' that still retains traces of the latter's baggage. Perhaps it is better to say that her talent lay in composition: of people as well as canvases.

Though Vanessa was a consummate hostess, organising dinners for Derain and Picasso, as well as a top-notch schmoozer, touring Florence with Vernon Lee and Paris with Gertrude Stein, she was also an early convert to abstract painting. Some critics complained that her work wore its origins too crudely, and paintings such as *Study of a Woman* (*c.* 1916–17) or the distempered screen *Bathers in a Landscape* (1913) can feel like garden-variety rehashings of Cézanne, Picasso and Modigliani. But others, such as *A Conversation* (1913–16), transform less obvious sources: a Giottesque woman in black hunches towards two companions whose steeply sloped faces suggest Kirchner's pinched planes. Great swathes of smock recall the Fauvists' constricted palette, but also suggest the blocking of single colour characteristic of the mosaic technique with which Vanessa was experimenting. And while at first glance the encounter might seem to take place in a voguish theatre box, in the manner of Cassatt or Sickert, these three companions are actually conversing before a window that looks on to the bright daubs of springtime blooms. To find in the quotidian the gravity of the Arena Chapel and the allure of a Berlin boulevard or a Camden Town stage was a move that roused her sister's 'envy'.

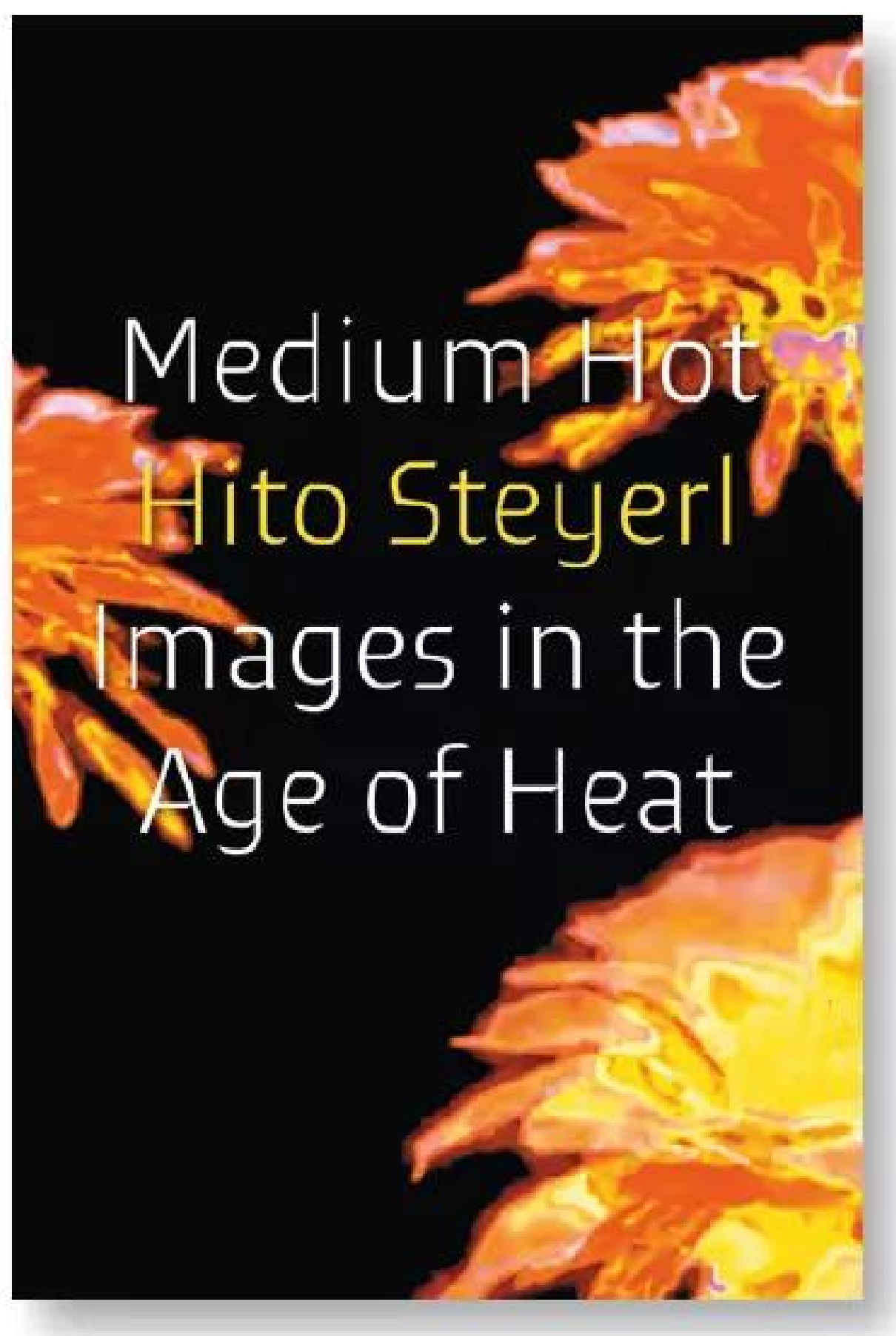
For Vanessa, painting was a portal to 'another world'. More specifically, it was an escape from the 'railway station' of home life. Maternity is the subject of her most powerful paintings: the sleeping slip of paint that is *Julian Bell* (1908); a stillborn 'nativity', *Woman and Baby* (*c.* 1912, now lost), made after a miscarriage; the stilted world that a reluctant Madonna forsakes in *Studland Beach* (*c.* 1912). Whether these amount to an 'objectivity and a determination to inject an alternative reality into the Post-Impressionist fictions with which she was surrounded' and a 'challenge to the male gaze', as Hitchmough claims, is debatable. The author's sensitive readings themselves suggest more nuanced possibilities.

With Fry and Grant, she started the Omega Workshops, which brought modern design to the mainstream, and the Grafton Group, which held room for a cross-Channel avant-garde in the xenophobic years surrounding the First World War. That both were built on principles of anonymity and collaboration helped, in the short term, to get her work shown, but in the long run, ensured that credit would go to her male colleagues. Her relegation to the footnotes of modernism was a prospect she predicted. In 1923, the *Burlington Magazine* dubbed her 'the most important woman painter in Europe', but she was under no illusion that her legacy would live up to that sobriquet. Vanessa died in 1961 and, when Bloomsbury came back into vogue, some of her unsigned works at Charleston were attributed to Grant. It was a bitter irony for an artist who wrote 'how terrified' she was of the 'usual female fate' – but not one that would have surprised her.

Emily Cox has a PhD in art history from Yale University.

Welcome to the machine

This stylish polemic casts AI image-making as bland at best and exploitative at worst, writes ***Tim Smith-Laing***



Medium Hot: Images in the Age of Heat
Hito Steyerl
Verso, £17.99
ISBN 9781804298022

During the second half of the 20th century the favoured metaphor for the effortless and detached exercise of power was 'the push of a button'. It linked everyone from ordinary citizens through to the leaders of nations, for whom this same gesture could activate anything from an ice maker to nuclear war. After the millennium, the metaphor shifted, as innovation replaced many buttons with just one: the click of a mouse, which became the marker of everything from winning an online auction to raining fire on insurgents from an air-force base a thousand miles away. Now, in the incipient age of AI, a shift is underway, and the metaphor will have to shift too. ChatGPT and its siblings are intent on removing the button and the mouse to create a world in which a mere articulated thought will accomplish their work and ours – driving cars, killing enemies, making art. And so mastery shrinks from a push to a click to a wish. Which new metaphor will win is not yet clear, but I would put money on the one cited by Hito Steyerl in the opening pages of *Medium Hot*: fire and forget.

While *Medium Hot* does not trail its interest in AI on the cover (its title is a nod to Marshall McLuhan's designation of television as a 'cool medium'), AI is its central subject and its substance a sustained argument against both the firing and the forgetting. At its heart is the question of what lies behind the AI-generated images that seem to be taking over the visual realm and how all that relates to a world in which 'heat' of one kind or another is increasing continuously. They emerge at a time of heat in every sense of the word: 'an era of widespread multi-crisis – with regular financial breakdowns […], post-pandemic recessions, accelerating climate change and increasing extreme weather events, rising right-wing and neofascist movements globally' as well as active conflicts in 'Yemen, Ukraine, Tigray, Gaza, Sudan and Congo'. The more 'machine "autonomy"' we get, 'the more entangled and messed up the world seems to be [and] almost everything impacts everything else'. However benign the enterprise of image-generation might seem, it results in objects whose very creation involves 'wrecking their surroundings through the extraction of labour, data and resources, rendering warfare, marketing and surveillance as variations on the same spectrum'. Each one creates 'some kind of damage or partial destruction of reality'. What sceptics like to term 'AI slop' might better be termed AI toxic waste.

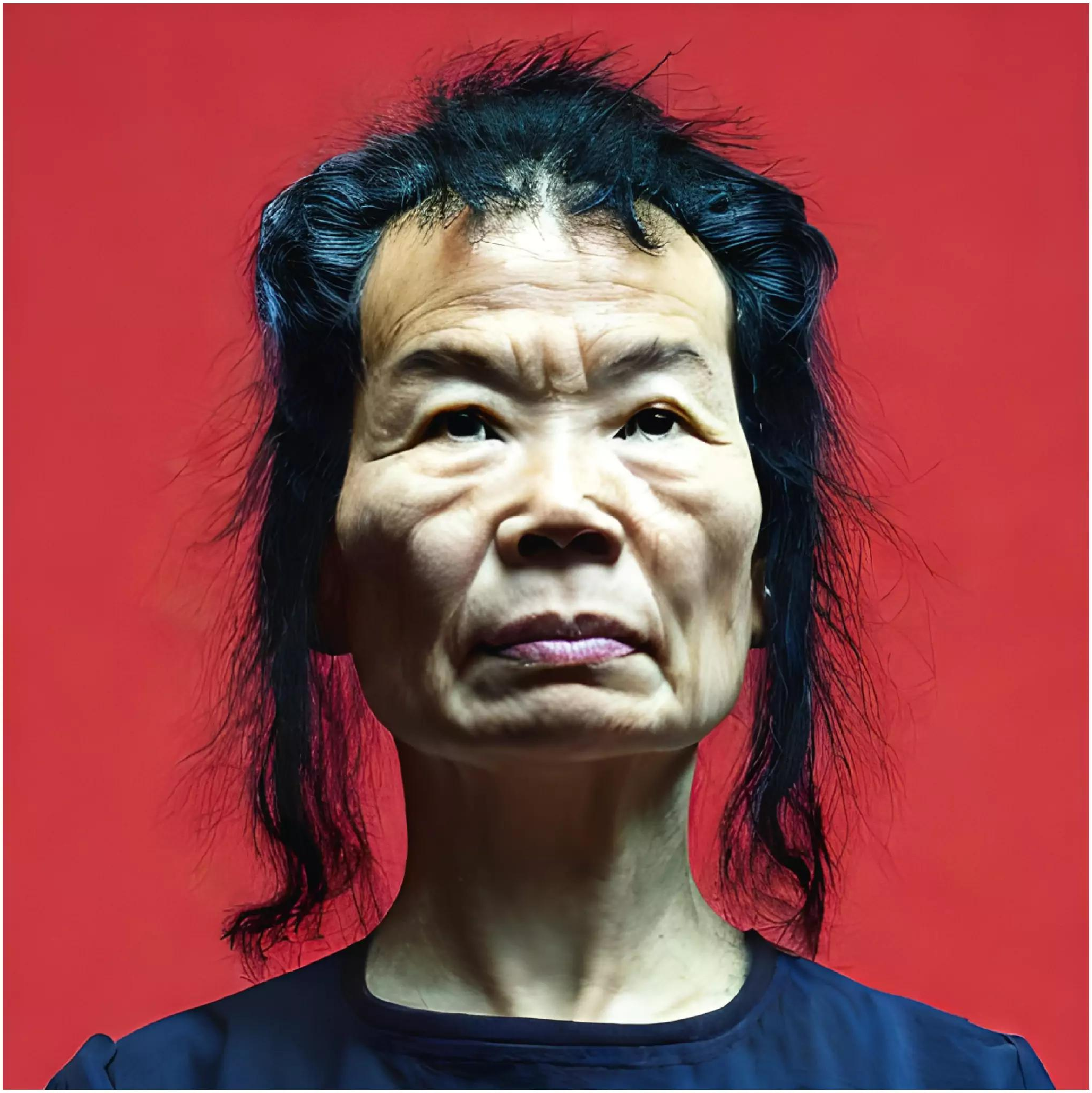
How and why such such waste is produced is another question, and readers familiar with Steyerl's work as an artist, film-maker and writer will know better than to expect straightforward answers. *Medium Hot* steers clear of the 'normativity and structural conformism' of standard academic writing, in part because it is so 'easily reproducible' by systems such as ChatGPT and in part because that is just not how Steyerl's brain functions. In a mode reminiscent of her work in films such as *November* (2004) and *Liquidity Inc.* (2014), the ten essays in here make use of both journalistic investigation and theory, but they are powered too by wilder modes of fantasy and juxtaposition. That they are capped off with an engagingly surreal 'collaboration' with the AI program GPT-3 makes total sense, in context.

Thus, the 'Janus Problem', in which additional ghostly faces appear in the results of certain image-generators leads her on to the real-world phenomenon of 'ghost workers' – also called 'microworkers' – who help to train AI models. These include Syrian refugees in Germany employed to filter images of their own destroyed home towns 'deemed too violent for social media consumers' but not too violent for the very people forced into exile by that same destruction. The mass collection of data from such microworkers builds systems that produce images as if by 'unmediated magic', when in fact their source is 'massive exploitation and expropriation at the level of production'. Perhaps then, Steyerl suggests, the 'ghostly emanations' of the Janus Problem are 'in fact portraits of the hidden microworkers, haunting and pervading' the outputs.

The essays here are as insightful as they are dense, and no less convincing for their forays into wild reasoning. They are also, as Steyerl fans will expect, memorably stylish, above all in delivering a damning verdict. By three essays in, I had lost count of the sections I had underlined for quoting. 'In the absence of a killer app, the [AI] industry tries to fall back on the original killer apps – weapons'; statistical renderings such as the unflattering portrait of Steyerl produced by the AI image-generator Stable Diffusion are 'mean images' in the widest sense of the phrase; the smoothed, misshapen, truncated and elongated human bodies produced by Stable Diffusion 3 are 'knuckleporn'. It is, indeed, hard to imagine ChatGPT mimicking her with any success.

While some of the ground covered here will be familiar to those already following developments in AI, *Medium Hot* is a brilliant salvo against exploitative blandness and the damage it depends on to exist. Steyerl's approach is, of course, anything but fire and forget: as she notes, all descriptions at this stage are preliminary and her work is far from done. If she is right that we are on track for a future in which 'any decision is automated and determined by some sort of elite eugenicism, military-purpose AGI, cryptosovereigns and reality TV extinction spectacles', at least readers of *Medium Hot* will know what is happening to them.

Tim Smith-Laing is a writer, critic and teacher based in London.



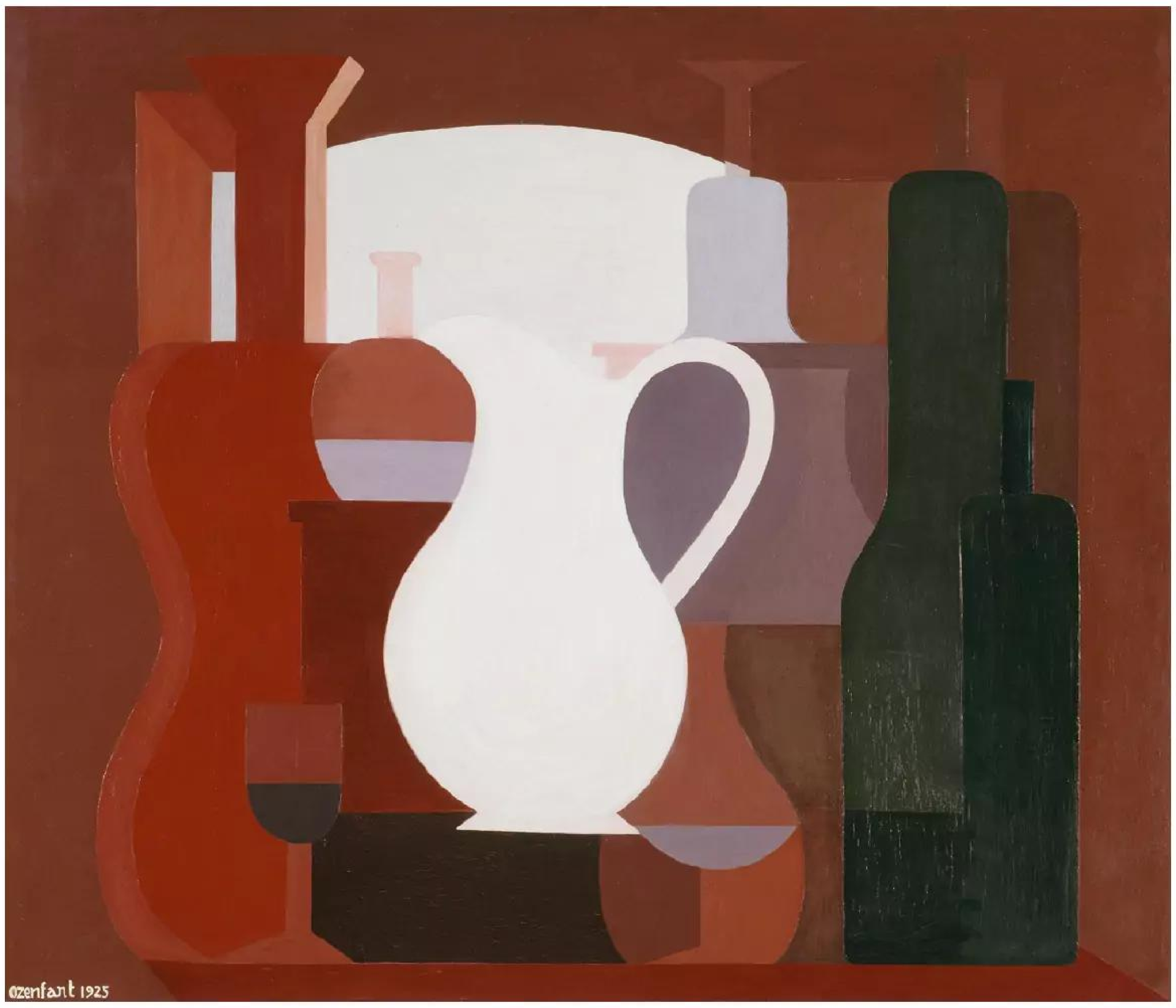
1. *Image of Hito Steyerl*, a portrait of the author generated by the AI model Stable Diffusion

Courtesy Hito Steyerl

Apollo at 100

The purest of the Purists

Charles Darwent on the difference a century has made to Amédée Ozenfant



Le Pot blanc, 1925, Amédée Ozenfant (1866–1966), oil on wood, 151.5×176.5cm. Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de la Ville de Strasbourg

Photo: © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2025

In 1925, the year this magazine first appeared, Amédée Ozenfant painted a picture called *Le Pot blanc*. Like other of Ozenfant's pictures of that year – *Vase*, say, or *Three Vases* – it was not a memorable work. It is unlikely that you will have seen it, or be able to call it to mind. *Le Pot blanc* was given to Strasbourg's Musée d'art moderne 60 years ago. It has spent the last 40 of those years in storage.

To the victor, the spoils. Also painted in 1925 were Picasso's *Three Dancers* and Kandinsky's *Trois éléments*, both of which you will have seen, if only in reproduction. The Picasso is in Tate Modern; Kandinsky's painting, like Ozenfant's, is in Strasbourg, where, unlike *Le Pot blanc*, it is always on show. Yet when these works were painted, their makers were as famous as each other. The century of *Apollo*'s existence has treated them very differently. As the art historian John Golding was to write, 'Perhaps no other artist of comparable stature has undergone such an almost total eclipse as Ozenfant.'

Why? Let us look again at 1925. The likeness between the three works painted by Ozenfant that year is remarkable. Each is composed in paraline perspective, its subjects being pushed flat against the picture plane like pieces in a jigsaw. Their brown-on-brown palette is the same, as are the objects – carafes, guitars, jugs – it is used to depict. Ozenfant described them as 'object types', things so ancient in their form and use that they had ceased to have an individual existence and become cyphers of themselves. Together, these traits would make up a style called Purism, a term coined by Ozenfant around 1916 in his magazine, *L'Élan*.

Its watchword was restraint. Where Surrealism was subjective and individualist, Purism set out to be the opposite. Purists could only paint certain things, in certain colours and a certain way. Part of the thinking behind this was that an art that shunned difference would lead to a world free of war. But there was another logic. Ozenfant was car mad: in 1911, he had designed the Hispano Ozenfant, built for him by the celebrated Spanish auto makers Hispano Suiza. By far the most famous car manufacturer by 1916 was Henry Ford, and Ozenfant took Ford's embracing of mass production and assembly lines to heart. Because of these, automobiles were no longer the playthings of the rich. What was needed was an equivalent in painting – not difference but sameness, prefabricated elements that could be bolted together in a standardised palette. Purist canvases would be the Model T Fords of art.

In Ozenfant's imagining, a small number of artists, including himself, would produce object-type paintings – works so inevitable, so *pure*, that, like carafes and jugs, they could act as templates for infinite reproduction. These would not be ersatz but real, painted by a cadre of Purist-trained craftsmen who would work as a human assembly line. *Le Pot blanc* would engender a thousand more *Pots blancs*, or five thousand, or ten. Each would be bought by a grateful *petit bourgeois* whose life would be infinitely enriched by it.

The idea did not catch on. Artists including Picasso and Juan Gris absorbed the aesthetic lessons of Purism and moved on. Perhaps the purest Purist was Ozenfant's friend Fernand Léger, although one has to look hard to see the influence.

As to the philosophy of Purism, it too was a victim of its moral uprightness. This demanded that output be shared, and Ozenfant had shared his with a young Swiss architect called Charles-Édouard Jeanneret. Their 1920 essay, *Le purisme*, was jointly signed, although in Jeanneret's case with the *nom de plume* newly invented by his mentor: Le Corbusier. In 1925, the pair fell out. It was the end of Purism; if you Google it now, it is described as Le Corbusier's invention. History is capricious and seldom fair.

Charles Darwent's next book, *Monsieur Ozenfant's Academy*, is published in July by Art Publishing, Inc.

The next issue: an interview with the Queen of Norway, the many faces of Amy Sherald, the return of the Gilded Age, Emily Kam Kngwarray's monumental art, and Cinecittà in focus

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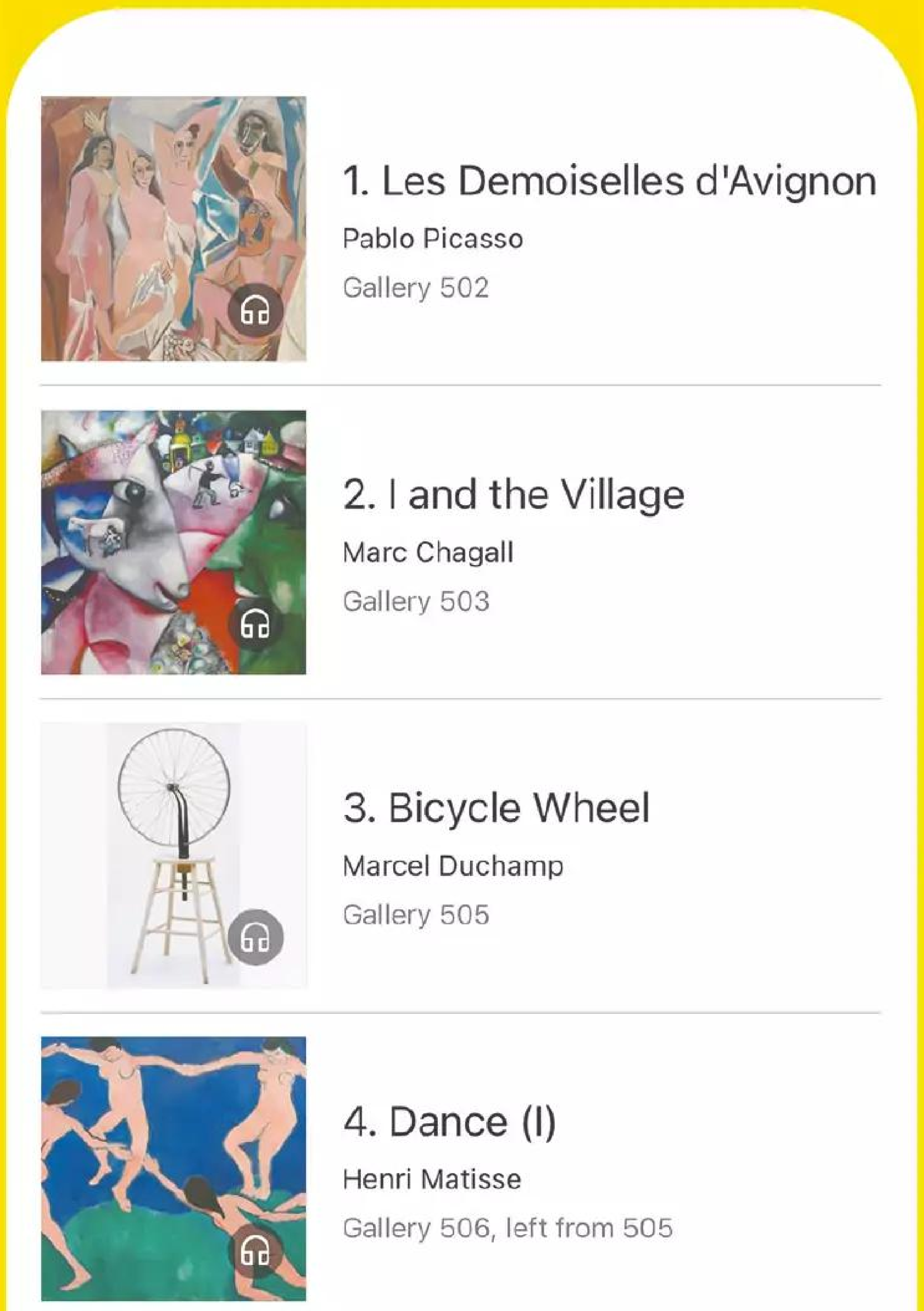

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Pablo Picasso
Gallery 502

2. I and the Village
Marc Chagall
Gallery 503

3. Bicycle Wheel
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Gallery 505

4. Dance (I)
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